

eNACSO
THE EUROPEAN NGO ALLIANCE FOR CHILD SAFETY ONLINE
LAUNCH OF THE POLICY PAPER *WHEN “FREE” ISN’T*

DRAFT MEDIA STATEMENT

Today eNACSO releases “When *Free* isn’t” a report which makes a strong case for improved policy, law and action to protect children against unfair and damaging business practices online.

Globally, 1 in 3 internet users are below the age of 18. Children and young people are the fastest growing group of users, actively influencing purchasing decisions within their families or themselves directly buying online content and offline products.

“Children and young people are spending large amounts of money online. We need to recognise that as an enduring fact and establish a charter for children as consumers. If a business is willing to take money from a child it should accept it has a higher duty of care to that young person if anything goes wrong with the product or service or they need help”. John Carr, expert of eNACSO and co-author of the Policy Paper *When “free” isn’t* on the text, May 2016.

Businesses know this and have developed commercial practices targeting children and young people but policy makers and legislators have been slow to recognize this and take action to address violations of children’s rights.

The report welcomes action taken so far, but suggests that the EU and its Member States are not keeping up with the rapid developments which are shaping the highly commercialized nature of the internet. The recently adopted General Data Protection Package was described by MEP Anna Maria Corazza-Bildt as a “missed opportunity to protect our children online” (Plenary Debate Wednesday on the GDPR 13 April, 2016).

Claude Moraes, Labour MEP for London and Chair of the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee supports the call for impact assessment and has recently asked the EC to “*look more closely at the issues, challenges and sensitivities which exist around questions associated with the age of consent for the use of the Internet and online services*”. He also calls for a consultation with “*a wide range of stakeholders*” and “*acknowledged experts in the fields of interest*”.

“The internet offers so much for our young people but we also have a responsibility to ensure that we hold our corporations to the same high standards online that we do offline. This is not straightforward and we hope that this report will uncover some truths and provide a solid foundation for constructive debate”. Professor Agnes Nairn, co-author of the Policy Paper *When “free” isn’t* on the text, May 2016.

When Free isn’t calls on the EC and Member States to carefully assess the impact on children’s rights and interests in the continued development of law and policy under the Digital Single Market, and to ensure that relevant stakeholders are consulted before decisions that have an impact on children are taken. In particular National Data Protection Authorities and the new European Data Protection Supervisor are urged to engage in addressing the position of children and young people as online consumers.

“I hope ‘When Free isn’t can be both informative and an eye opener not only for decision makers but also for parents who still think the internet is FREE and have no idea companies are making billions by ignoring or bluntly stepping on children’s rights. It’s time to understand that we cannot absolve companies from any responsibility by simply assuming they will do the right or moral thing. It’s time to act!”. Barbara Lilliu, external expert, co-author of the Policy Paper *When “free” isn’t* on the text, May 2016.