



Building a child-friendly Europe: turning a vision into reality

Conference on the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2012-2015

Workshop 1: Making children the masters of the game: data protection and the new media environment.

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Before describing the activities of this workshop, I would like to highlight one of this conference's best features, which is that it has brought together people with different areas of expertise, types of experience and interests, from specialists in child participation and data protection experts to government representatives, all serving the common goal of the child's best interests. We have all been able to benefit from these varying viewpoints and thoughts, which have been expressed so openly and constructively here in Monaco yesterday and today.

Workshop 1 on "Making children the masters of the game: data protection and the new media environment" aroused considerable interest, attracting about forty participants. The aim of the workshop was to highlight the broad range of circumstances in which the use of new technologies could put children in vulnerable or dangerous positions vis-à-vis their private lives and their personal data, so as to pinpoint more easily what action was required.

The speakers' statements made it possible to review the relevant laws and regulations, which, although not targeted specifically at children, are designed to apply to all individuals, including children. We took note of the current work to revise the relevant standard-setting frameworks, not only the framework established by the Council of Europe through its Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (Convention 108), but also that established by the European Union.

Several practical examples were given of the importance of awareness-raising and measures to enhance the capacities of all those involved in the process of child protection, beginning with children themselves. For instance, we heard about the action taken both by civil society and by the authorities, in Monaco in particular (through *Action innocence*) but also elsewhere in Europe through eNACSO. These activities resolutely attempt to raise awareness among children and parents about the potential risks of breaches of their privacy.

Alerting children and providing them with the means of protecting their data is a vital need, but the question is what they really think about this. What understanding do they have of their rights and what is their view of the notion of "private life"? This is precisely what Schoolnet and the Council of Europe will attempt to clarify by conducting a survey in the Council's 47 member states among children aged between 11 and 16, with the ultimate aim of drafting and widely disseminating a Charter by and for young people containing 10 principles relating to the protection of personal data and private life.

This overview of the issues connected with the new media environment would have been incomplete and unrealistic if one of the main players in the world of social networks, Facebook, had not also taken part in our work. In this connection I would like to stress how important it is to involve all the stakeholders and thank Facebook for taking part in this type of exchange. The measures that this company has taken to protect children have been described to us, including privacy settings, age checking systems, specific profiles for users under the age of 18, means of reporting abusive content or behaviour such as cyberbullying, and co-operation projects with various national bodies to draw up practical guides or visit schools, thus equipping children, parents and teachers with means of protecting data and ensuring that privacy is respected.

The participants fully understood the extent and urgency of the need to meet the new challenges children face when using the Internet. Children live and breathe the Internet, which provides them with a living environment and an air supply, but the question is how to keep that air pure and enable them to continue to benefit in complete peace of mind and innocence from the marvels of this extraordinary catalyst of knowledge, sharing and exchange. Every time children visit a page, make a new “friend”, update their “status”, enter a query on a search engine or tag a photo, there are serious implications for the protection of their private lives and personal data which need to be taken into account.

Our extensive exchanges with the participants raised many key issues and resulted in several practical proposals and recommendations on, for example, giving consent, determining a minimum age for access to social networks, making it easier to report abuse on the Internet, setting parameters for personal information published on social networks, proper deletion of data at the express request of users, improving the visibility of and simplifying privacy options, making geolocation impossible for minors and drawing up good practice guides with a view to information being appropriate to children’s needs.

It was clear to the participants in this workshop that particular attention should be paid to the protection of children’s personal data in view of their increasing exposure to new and increasingly numerous, sophisticated and dangerous challenges. “Children deserve enhanced protection” was the main message expressed by participants. They invited the Council of Europe to continue its important work in this area, while gearing this more to children’s specific needs and ages, providing member states with guidance on the key issues to be dealt with. They also asked it to offer children the means of fully exercising their fundamental rights and freedoms – particularly their freedom of expression and participation – and to help them to get fully involved in their own protection on the new media and be the true “masters of the game”.

I would like to thank our chair, Mr Giovanni Buttarelli, and the speakers for their invaluable contribution to the success of this workshop.