Report on the proceedings of the
Safer Internet Forum 2015
28-29 October 2015
Forum Geesseknäppchen, Luxembourg

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Further information from the Forum, including the full agenda, conference brochure with speaker biographies, presentations and graphic recordings can be found at
Executive summary

The annual Safer Internet Forum is funded by the European Commission’s Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) programme as part of the European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children. The overall aim of the twelfth annual Safer Internet Forum (28-29 October 2015) was to debate how to break down barriers to help make the internet a better and more trusted place for young people across Europe.

Approximately 230 participants from more than 30 countries attended the two-day event including young people, parents, policymakers, entrepreneurs, researchers, industry and the European Commission. Youth representatives from many of the 31 countries in the Insafe network participated in the discussions and outlined how they see the internet and new technologies influencing their lives, now and in the future.

In his opening address, Roberto Viola, Director General, DG CONNECT argued that the internet should not only be a safe environment where users have trust and confidence in the tools and services they use, but also an environment that promotes positive creativity, empowerment and participation, particularly among young people.

The Forum included sessions on a wide variety of subjects but four key themes emerged:

• Defining and securing children’s rights in the digital world.
• Dealing with problematic youth-produced user-content.
• Promoting user control and community participation.
• Understanding the impact of new concepts of connectivity.

Defining and securing children’s rights in the digital world

In an ever more complex technological world, there was much discussion about how to define children’s digital rights and how to overcome the barriers to achieving those rights. In recognition of the interconnected nature of online and offline rights, most Forum participants accepted that the principles outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) were a good starting point. However, there was also discussion about the perceived conflict between children’s rights and parental rights in some societies. Lack of internet access due to poverty, geography, gender, language or social norms was seen as a significant barrier to realising children’s digital rights. Many also agreed that fully integrating digital learning in school curriculums was essential. Finally, a number of speakers highlighted the need for more meaningful opportunities for young people to participate in decisions about internet governance. In this respect, this year’s publication of the Youth Manifesto was seen as an important step forward.

Dealing with problematic youth-produced user-content

Another major theme of the Forum was how to deal with youth-produced online content that might have negative consequences. Many participants accepted the need for a more nuanced understanding of problems like sexting. Research shows an increasing tendency for young people to upload nude or partially-nude images although in many countries this is considered a criminal activity. Some argued that a more lenient approach should be taken to sexting if it occurred between peers and did not involve coercion of any kind. Individual practical advice and awareness
campaigns for parents and children were mentioned as alternative solutions. Speakers also addressed the emerging phenomena of sextortion, which can result from sexting between peers but can also be a type of grooming by strangers for sexual favours or for money. Related to this area, there was some discussion about whether counselling and advice should be made available to potential child abusers as a preventative strategy.

**Promoting user control and community participation**

In his opening address, Roberto Viola set the tone for much of the Forum when he called for young people to be allowed to grow and shape their world in a safe, creative way and become active digital citizens in a participatory society. There was general agreement that a prerequisite for encouraging youth participation was to increase their control over the data and content that they contribute as citizens and consumers. The Forum’s keynote speaker, Gemma Galdon Clavell, stressed the importance of understanding every stage of data management and youth participants were particularly active in calling for greater respect for their privacy and simplified Terms and Conditions. Many industry participants accepted the need for greater transparency to reassure users about their online privacy and security. However, they also argued that users should make greater use of the many safety settings that already exist, as well as think before they share information.

**Understanding the impact of new concepts of connectivity**

In her concluding remarks, Patricia Manson of the European Commission highlighted the challenge of dealing with the complexity of the emerging Internet of Things (IoT) and this was another important theme of the Forum. Particular attention was given to how IoT was impacting on children through the emergence of connected toys. It was noted that while these toys can stimulate the imagination and engagement of children, they are also big business and raise questions about data profiling and security. Industry representatives accepted the need for greater transparency and some other participants stressed the need to develop clear child online privacy rules as well as child safe applications that protect children’s data.
Introduction

The 12th edition of the Safer Internet Forum (SIF) under the theme ‘Breaking down barriers for a better internet’ took place in Luxembourg on 28-29 October 2015. Approximately 230 stakeholders in the field of child online safety from more than 30 countries across the globe were in attendance to discuss the latest trends, risks and solutions related to youth online safety and empowerment.

Participants at the two-day event included youth ambassadors, academics, industry, teachers, NGOs, the European Commission and Ministry representatives. The event included lively discussion on topics ranging from children’s digital rights and the phenomena of sexting and sextortion to the Internet of Toys, privacy and community participation. A graphic recorder was present throughout the event to record the key points from discussions.

The Safer Internet Forum is organised and funded by the European Commission with the assistance of the Insafe Coordination Team at European Schoolnet, under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) programme as part of the European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children.

The Strategy supports projects and events to help create a safer and more positive online environment for children and young people, as well as to promote industry self-regulation and international co-operation.
The European Commission welcomes Forum participants
Engaging in a trusted internet for the digital society and digital economy

Chair: Giuseppe Abbamonte, Director, Media and Data, DG CONNECT, European Commission
Opening speaker: Roberto Viola, Director General, DG CONNECT
Welcome: Eric Krier, National Youth Service (SNJ) and BEE SECURE (the Luxembourgish Safer Internet Centre)

Under the banner of ‘Breaking down barriers for a better internet’, Giuseppe Abbamonte opened the Safer Internet Forum with the observation that the annual event is a unique opportunity for everyone to share their experience. He described the Forum as a place of trust where policy makers, industry, parents, teachers and especially youth can work together to develop the framework and conditions to ensure a positive and safe online environment.

Roberto Viola joined the Forum via video link to welcome participants and remind them that the internet is nothing less than a game changer for our society and economy. It must not only be a safe environment where users have trust and confidence in the tools and services they use, but also an environment that promotes positive creativity, particularly among young people. To achieve this, he argued that legislation can help but above all industry must step up to the challenge of self-regulation and co-regulation. The Director General of DG CONNECT also emphasised that digital learning and the acquisition of digital skills were essential and must become part of the DNA of the education system. Specific skills like coding should be part of the curriculum and the internet should also be used to teach other subjects like art, music and science. The overall goal must be to empower young people to grow and shape their world in a safe, creative way and become active digital citizens in a participatory society.

After questions from the audience, the first session concluded with a welcome from the Luxembourg hosts of this year’s Forum. Eric Krier pointed out that the Forum Geesseknäppchen venue was already being used by thousands of students from surrounding schools as a co-working hub to build digital skills.
In her keynote address, Gemma Galdon Clavell focused on the barriers to creating a better internet for kids and the kind of remedial action that is needed. Her key message was that we should like new technology but not be in love with it.

To illustrate her point, the Catalan researcher and policy adviser highlighted three commonly held views or ‘mantras’ that needed to be challenged. Firstly, she questioned the belief that technology by itself will solve all our problems, arguing instead for a socio-technological approach. Secondly, she queried whether more information is always the key to better decision making, arguing that tackling inequality in education is not really a question of having more data but of having the necessary political commitment. Thirdly, she challenged the popular conception that young people do not care about privacy as much as older adults, citing recent studies that suggest that the opposite may be true.

Gemma Galdon Clavell went on to propose a framework for thinking about the challenges that new digital technology presents. Her first suggestion was to define the problem that any new technology is supposedly trying to solve and ask whether that technology is desirable or even necessary. We should then ask whether key stakeholders like teachers, parents and students have been asked about the technology and have accepted it. Thirdly, we should question whether the new technology or service meets the ethics and values underpinning existing legislation. Finally, to ensure that technology is held to account, she argued that we need to really understand every stage of data management to make sure it complies with current laws.

In her response to the keynote speaker, Josie Fraser stressed that young people are particularly vulnerable because they are trying to define their place in the world and what they do now will impact on their future. For his part, Simon Milner accepted the public fear of surveillance but argued that industry cannot track everything and the biggest barrier to a better internet was lack of access.
Parallel session A1: Youth empowerment – skills, literacy and creativity

Chair: Josie Fraser, Social and educational technologist (UK)
Panellists: Niels-Christian Bilenberg, Centre for Digital Youth Care (Denmark); Michael Dreier, Outpatient Clinic for Behavioural Addictions UMC Universität Mainz (Germany); Kira O’Connor, Twitter (Ireland); Chris Pinchen, Playfair Training/DigitalLiteracyLu (Luxembourg)

The first of two parallel sessions on the theme of keeping up with technology focused on how to embrace the positive. Josie Fraser talked about the importance of online identity, community, anonymity, digital literacy and the role of young people as agents for change before introducing the rest of the panel.

Niels-Christian Bilenberg agreed that anonymity and empowering young people to be creative online were essential to creating a better internet. In line with this, he introduced the work of the Centre for Digital Youth Care in Denmark, which offers individual counselling for sexually-abused children as well as group chats and peer-led forums in an effort to build social understanding and self-awareness.

For his part, Michael Dreier introduced a study focusing on the use of technology by under-eight-year-olds that revealed a high level of online capability even among this young age group. The research also revealed their tendency to associate the internet with YouTube, while older children associated it with Facebook and adults with Google. He went on to address the issue of behavioural addiction online, which can develop from a very early age and is emerging as an important challenge for society.

Kira O’Connor gave some examples of how teachers around the world are using Twitter in their curriculum, including correcting spelling mistakes in tweets by celebrities. She also stressed the importance of allowing young people to freely shape their own online identity and observed that they were often too embarrassed to tell friends or family if they were being bullied. For this reason, Twitter has teamed up with the Diana Awards to encourage young people to take a stand against bullying.

Finally, Chris Pinchen talked about his work on surveillance, censorship, privacy issues and digital literacy and the role of peer-to-peer learning in empowering children. He also emphasised the importance of promoting the creative use of digital and networked devices, while helping users to maintain privacy.
Parallel session A2: Youth protection – grooming, sexting and sextortion

Chair: Agnes Uhereczky, COFACE (Belgium)
Panellists: Kuno Sørensen, Save the Children (Denmark); Maaike Pekelharing, Meldpunt Kinderporno (Netherlands); Becky Foreman, Microsoft (UK); Simona Maurino, Telefono Azzuro (Italy); Kate Burls, National Crime Agency CEOP (UK); Ethel Quayle, University of Edinburgh (UK)

The second of the two parallel sessions on keeping up with technology focused on how to challenge some of the more negative aspects of the online environment. Agnes Uhereczky kicked off the panel discussion with the observation that many online problems are as much behavioural as technological.

Ethel Quayle argued that a more nuanced understanding of problems like sexting was needed. She pointed out that sexting currently involved images more than text and that US and UK data suggested much of it was produced by young people themselves in a spirit of sexual risk taking and that in most cases there were no negative consequences. A series of animated films formed the basis of Kate Burls’ presentation on sexting. The films aim to help parents understand that the activity can be a part of growing up and thus feel more confident about talking to their children. Simona Maurino addressed the emerging phenomena of sextortion, which can result from sexting between peers but can also be a type of grooming by strangers for sexual favours or for money.

Becky Foreman highlighted Microsoft’s focus on the 4 Cs of internet risk: content, contact, conduct and commerce while Maaike Pekelharing argued that individual practical advice and awareness campaigns were the keys to tackling sexting and other problems. Finally, Kuno Sørensen made a plea for greater attention to be paid to offenders. He noted that counselling and advice was available to potential child abusers in Germany, Holland and the UK, and the approach was now being adopted in Denmark.
Children’s rights in a digital world

Speaker: Jasmina Byrne, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (Italy)
Respondent youth panel: Florian (Austria), Grace (Ireland), Anna (Romania), Ben (Luxembourg).

After outlining some of the key provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Jasmina Byrne went on to list the principle barriers to and opportunities for realising those rights in the online world. In the area of access, she noted that while over 80 per cent of people used the internet in the developed world, the figure was below 10 per cent in less-developed countries. Barriers to access included geography, gender, social norms, poverty and language.

She also stressed the importance of recognising the interconnected nature of children’s online and offline rights as well as the often insufficient mediation and support by teachers, parents and carers. Jasmina Byrne went on to emphasise the responsibility of other stakeholders such as industry, governments, internet governance bodies and other international organisations. However, she also highlighted the opportunities that the internet offered children in terms of civic participation and engagement, where online activity can often transcend barriers of gender, disability and minority status. She concluded by outlining UNICEF’s launch of a new Global Kids Online project in collaboration with the London School of Economics to better guide research at the international level.

As part of their response, the youth panel were asked what participation meant to them. Florian noted that participation also entailed feedback and questioned whether the opinions of young people were really taken into account by governments, companies and other stakeholders. He suggested that feedback could be facilitated if there was just one platform for young people to give their opinions rather than multiple ones; an idea which Anna also supported. Grace cited the digital rights outlined in the recent Youth Manifesto as a good example of participation but said the challenge was now to make them a reality. There was general agreement that respect for privacy was a prerequisite for encouraging youth participation and Ben noted that the terms and conditions that addressed this issue were often so unclear that even lawyers had difficulty understanding them.
Parallel session B1: The right to play - Internet of Toys

Chair: Gry Hasselbach, Mediamocracy.org (Denmark)

Panellists: Dieter Carstensen, LEGO (Denmark); Matas Petrikas, Vai Kai (Germany); Wendy Grossman, Freelance writer (UK) (video message); Krissa Watry, Dynepic (USA) (video message), Stephane Chaudron (as parents’ panellist) (Belgium)

The first of two parallel sessions exploring digital rights was introduced by Gry Hasselbach. Before introducing the panel, she offered her own observations on how the Internet of Things (IoT) is impacting on children through the emergence of connected toys. She noted that while data-enabled toys can stimulate the imagination and engagement of children, these new smart toys are also big business and raise questions about data profiling and security.

Wendy Grossman expressed similar concerns about data gathering and the invasion of children’s privacy. She stressed the importance of understanding what information was being collected and teaching kids to ask questions.

As the founder of a Berlin-based start up building intuitive connected wooden toys, Matas Petrikas argued that such toys can offer a natural way of playing with technology and learning about computing. Rather than tying children into marketing systems, he maintained that smart toys can connect children across continents, giving a new perception of closeness.

Krissa Watry has worked on the creation of an IoT platform specifically for kids. She emphasised the importance of developing clear and consistent child online privacy rules as well as tools to help app and toy companies develop child safe applications that protect children’s data.

As the head of digital child safety at a major toy manufacturer, Dieter Carstensen accepted that companies need to be transparent about the data they collect and communicate more with parents. However, he pointed out that profit cannot be a company’s only consideration because it is value that drives purchasing decisions. In this respect, he highlighted the attractiveness of voice-enabled toys, especially for young children who cannot read or write yet.

Stephane Chaudron highlighted that parents would like industry to think thoroughly about the impact of new technology on society and particularly on kids. At the same time, she acknowledged a high potential of smart of toys for supporting kids with learning disorders.
Parallel session B2: Children’s digital rights in and beyond Europe

Chair: Ellen Gorris, DG Justice and Consumers, European Commission
Panellists: Patrick Burton, Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (South Africa); John Carr OBE, eNACSO (UK); David Miles, Family Online Safety Institute (UK); Annie Mullins OBE, Ask.fm (UK)

Ellen Gorris opened the second parallel session exploring digital rights by stressing the importance of applying the UN Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC) to our digital world.

For his part, John Carr noted that access to technology, digital literacy and online safety were common concerns around the world. Since children accounted for billions of Euros of online purchases, he argued that they should have the same right to consumer protection and young people should also be given a greater say in internet governance.

From a South African perspective, Patrick Burton pointed out that poverty and access to resources were an even bigger problem in developing countries. He also noted that some legislation, such as the across-the-board criminalisation of sexting, was often counterproductive.

The high proportion of young people using the internet around the world and the different cultural context in which they were doing so were key concerns for David Miles. He pointed out that the western emphasis on parental responsibility was less relevant in countries like Bahrain where domestic staff often had a greater role in bringing up a family’s children.

Finally, Annie Mullins made a plea for more recognition of the day-to-day challenges faced by companies in adjudicating between children’s right to freedom of expression and their right to protection. She also highlighted the problem of dealing with cultural differences, such as Europe’s focus on the rights of the child compared with the US emphasis on parental rights, or questions of sexual expression where young people’s views might be different from those of parents.
Parallel session C1: Tools for user control and community participation

**Chair:** Martin Schmalzried, COFACE (Belgium)

**Panellists:** Brittany Smith, Google (UK); Richard Steppe, University of Leuven (Belgium); Ľuboš, Youth ambassador (Slovakia)

The first of two parallel sessions on restoring user trust and confidence was introduced by Martin Schmalzried. This session focused on tools and strategies to empower internet users by increasing their control over the data and content that they contribute as citizens and consumers.

From an industry perspective, Brittany Smith accepted that more transparency was needed to reassure users about their online privacy and security, which is why Google recently introduced a new FAQ at [privacy.google.com](http://privacy.google.com). However, she also argued that users need to know and use the many safety settings that already exist as well as think before they share information.

Richard Steppe welcomed the export features of Google and argued that data portability increases user trust and confidence. He also talked about the importance of a community-based approach and the need to recognise that companies often have to make decisions on privacy and security where there is no ideal solution.

From a youth perspective, Ľuboš stressed the primacy of personal data protection and the need for more opportunities to address the issue with industry and policy makers. He also noted that young people are becoming more cautious about sharing information on social media and often prefer one-to-one messaging services.
Parallel session C2: Key ingredients for better internet for children policies

Chair: Brian O’Neill, Dublin Institute of Technology (Ireland)
Panellists: Helena Dal, Swedish Media Council (Sweden); Eric Krier, National Youth Service/BEESECURE (Luxembourg); Giuseppe Pierro, Ministry of Education, University and Research (Italy); Boris Radanović, Croatian Safer Internet Centre (Croatia); Sharon Trotter, Australian Office of the Children’s eSafety Commissioner (Australia)

The second parallel session on restoring user trust and confidence focused on different international strategies used to ensure a better internet for children. Brian O’Neill began by outlining the development of a recent European Commission mapping and the creation of a BIK MAP tool for sharing information and analysing how policy has developed.

Helena Dal described Sweden’s particular focus on media and information literacy, including the ability of children and young people to critically assess information. Sweden also aims to create a safe online environment by helping teachers to develop their own competencies and fostering industry self-regulation.

In Luxembourg, Eric Krier explained that the Ministries of Economy, Education and the Family all worked together on internet safety and empowerment projects. The approach involves networking and mutual support; enabling active rather than just passive internet usage; and the application of sanctions against companies that break established norms to show that internet is not the "wild wild west".

Giuseppe Pierro noted that due to the significant fragmentation of safer internet initiatives in Italy, the Ministries of Education (MIUR) had to take a coordinating role. He acknowledged that this public involvement (by MIUR as well by the Ministry of Home Affairs) has become a main driver for public-private partnerships (PPPs) and led also to more effort by industry. Therefore, multiple stakeholders are still very much involved, including NGOs and an advisory board of 30 companies that help ensure the sustainability of internet initiatives.
As the newest Safer Internet Centre, Boris Radanović recognised that Croatia faced challenges but was already making significant progress. A new strategy for education, science and technology has seen the establishment of 15 eSchools in Croatia with a total of 150 planned.

Finally, Sharon Trotter outlined latest developments in Australia where a new Children’s eSafety Commissioner has just been set up. New legislation also provides a clearer definition of cyberbullying and can force social media companies to take down offending content.
Closing remarks: Better Internet for Kids - Play your part

Chair: Patricia Manson, DG CONNECT, European Commission
Panellists: Uwe Hasebrink, Hans Bredow Institute (Germany); Will Gardner, Childnet (UK); Andrea Parola, ICT Coalition for Children Online (Belgium); Ida, Youth ambassador (Sweden); Luboš, Youth ambassador (Slovakia)
Graphic recorder for the Forum: Anna Lena Schiller

The 2015 Safer Internet Forum concluded with a multiple stakeholder panel session led by Patricia Manson. She began by asking the panellists what they found most significant about this year’s Forum and what issues should be dealt with in the future.

From a youth perspective, Ida argued that the Forum had highlighted the lack of transparency particularly with the use of overly complex Terms and Conditions. The internet needed to be a discrete school subject and the focus should be on solutions rather than just problems. Luboš agreed that young people were definitely concerned about privacy and that digital skills were essential to understanding the internet. He also called for the creation of more positive online content.

Uwe Hasebrink observed that the Forum had thrown up a series of paradoxes: between privacy and sharing, continuity and change, and between high interactivity and low interaction. In terms of research, he stressed the need to identify the major digital trends rather than just focusing on individual technologies. Will Gardner called for a more careful use of language when discussing issues like sexting, which could mean different things depending on the context. Andrea Parola identified three major themes of the Forum: the idea that rights come with responsibilities, the value of digital skills and the need to ensure that laws and self-regulation protect users.

In her concluding remarks, Patricia Manson noted that dealing with the complexity of the Internet of Things and new forms of virtual reality-based interaction would be major challenges in the future. Digital skills and education would remain vital but these should be based on research and practical experience rather than instinct. Overall, she argued for more listening and greater collaboration to identify the solutions of the future.