Principles for the Safer Use of Connected Devices and Online Services by Children and Young People in the EU

This document contains a set of Good Practice ICT Principles, hereinafter referred to as "the Principles". The Principles are designed to increase awareness on practices that promote online safety and well-being of children and young people.

The terms "online services" embraces all services offered partly or exclusively over the internet and products, services or devices which are intended to provide access to the internet.

The Principles apply to services directed towards persons living in any EU Member State and devices designed for and placed in any EU market.

These Principles are aspirational and their intent is to extend good practice to a wider range of industry players and promote innovative ways to address the concerns about child online safety.

Signatories acknowledge established corporate good practice and national and EU level self-regulatory initiatives.

The document has been created and published by a range of providers of online services and the manufacturers of devices and software capable of connecting to them.

The document contains guidance that will be further developed through the ICT Principles Stakeholder Group which will be established under the aegis of these Principles. It will be of interest to, but is not limited to:

·   Manufacturers of desktop and laptop computers, mobile phones, tablets, TV set top boxes and gaming consoles

·   Network operators and connectivity providers

·   Online content and service providers

The decision to develop these Principles is a unique step in the evolution of industry self-regulation. It brings together for the first time a wide range of industry players across the whole of the industry ecosystem. The Principles draw on global best practice and take into account the current legal framework and obligations. The challenges we face are not limited to Europe, hence the need to keep the global dimension in mind while adopting an approach based on enabling technology and new services and solutions for consumers.

The Signatories of these Principles are leaders in the ICT sector in online service provision, content provision, network operation and manufacturing. They have agreed to apply these Principles to all relevant aspects of their products, service and business activities provided in the EU market.

Signatories recognise the range of services available, the diversity of users' cultural and legal norms, and differences in experience and expectations in this dynamic and fast-changing environment. Therefore the Principles focus on desired outcomes rather than on prescriptive technical implementations. It is essential to fully respect the local law requirements and the principles of technology-, service-, platform- and business model-neutrality, lying at the core of the EU regulatory framework.

Signatories of these Principles are committed to working with all relevant stakeholders to further and to strengthen the protection of children and young people online. No single company is involved in every element of the ecosystem, but nevertheless all are keen to further the aim of improving child protection

The Signatories support an ever wider adoption of the ICT Principles and call upon other industry players across the eco-system to take account of them and consider signing them, so as to further broaden the scope of coverage for the protection of children, especially as new services and platforms evolve.

The document sets out the background of the ICT Principles, their aims and the principles.

A.   Background

Over the last two decades, the Internet has become one of the most important sources of information, education and entertainment for both adults and children. Use of the Internet will continue to grow in the future and provide yet more innovative and useful services.

Over time, industry, governments, national and regional authorities, civil society, parents and teachers have adopted various strategies for educating children and young people[i] on how to use online services more safely, and directing them towards appropriate content, acknowledging that children may be less able to identify any potential new risks of Internet use. As the Internet evolves, it is important to continue this work through a partnership approach, whereby industry players, governments, schools, teachers and parents work together to help and guide children and young people to make the right choices so that they use the Internet in a safe, responsible, and effective manner.

Technology has now developed in such a way that the Internet can be accessed via a range of connected devices including PCs, smartphones, tablets, TV set-top boxes and games consoles and has enabled a multitude of innovative applications and services creating consumer benefits and leading to an increasingly integrated online environment. It is acknowledged that children may sometimes be less able to identify potential new risks associated with internet and communication services use or the emergence of new applications and devices.

Industry welcomes the recognition in the European Commission's Digital Agenda that those educational activities and awareness-raising campaigns for the wider public are a key part of building a strong digital economy in the EU. Both the EU and Member States can help to achieve these goals e.g. through e-safety curricula in schools, through the EU Safer Internet Programme, providing information and education to children and families on online safety, as well as by analysing the impact on children of using digital technologies through independent research. The approach set out in the Principles will give parents, carers and teachers' greater confidence that Signatories follow best practice in online child protection, and will help equip them with the knowledge and tools to advise their children appropriately.

B. Aims of the Principles for Safer Use of Connected Devices and Online Services by Children and Young People

The Principles aim to ensure that Signatories:

·   Encourage the development of innovative approaches which enhance safe use of the technology by children and young people

·   Encourage the empowerment of parents and carers to protect children and young people engaged in online activity through education and advice

·   Promote users' awareness of information and tools to help keep themselves safer online and of their obligations to behave responsibly towards other users

·   Encourage the provision of easily accessible, clear and transparent information to help users understand in a timely way the conditions of use for the service they are using, including what is permitted in terms of acceptable behaviour and user-generated content

·   Seek to promote users' awareness of how – and to whom – to report abuse and concerns, including – where available – specialised external agencies and law enforcement bodies.

The spirit of the Principles reflects, but does not amend or replace, existing self-regulatory instruments and initiatives including:

· The EU Safer Mobile Framework and the national codes of practice in 27 EU Member States
· The EU Safer Social Networking Principles
· The Mobile Alliance Against Child Sexual Abuse Content
· TeachToday.eu

The Signatories of these Principles welcome collaboration with other stakeholders concerned with child safety, such as:

· EU Commission

· European Parliament

· Council of the European Union

· Governments, National and Regional authorities, schools, other educational institutions and bodies representing teachers

· Parents and family organisations

· Child safety organisations

· Data protection and consumer protection authorities

· Online safety and advice bodies, such as INSAFE[ii] and INHOPE[iii] networks or equivalent bodies or approaches

· Civil liberties and user organisations

· Child development experts

· Other experts in the field as considered appropriate and necessary

· Media Authorities

· Police and Law enforcement Agencies

C. Principles for Safer Use of Connected Devices and Online Services by Children and Young People

1. Content

Signatories should:

· Indicate clearly where a service they offer may include content considered not to be appropriate for children and display prominently options which are available to control access to the content. This could include, where appropriate for the service, tools to manage access to certain content, advice to users or a recognised system of content labelling.

·   Display prominently and in an easily accessible location the Acceptable Use Policy, which should be written in easily-understandable language.

·   State clearly any relevant terms of service or community guidelines (i.e. how users are expected to behave and what is not acceptable) with which user generated content must comply.

·   Ensure that reporting options are in the relevant areas of the service.

·   Provide notice about the consequences for users if they post content which violates terms of service or community guidelines.

·   Continue work to provide innovative solutions able to support child safety protection tools and solutions.

2. Parental controls

Signatories should, as relevant for their products or services, assist parents to limit their children's exposure to potentially inappropriate content and contact. It is recognised that parental controls have limitations and cannot replace parents' engagement in their children's online use. Measures that are available or appropriate to each service/product will vary, but may include:

·   Manufacturers seeking to optimise hardware design to provide products which simply and clearly help parents to set appropriate levels of control on devices.

·   Network providers seeking to provide necessary tools and settings across their services to enable parents to set appropriate levels of control

·   Service and content providers making available the necessary tools and settings across their services to enable parents to set appropriate levels of control.

3. Dealing with abuse/misuse

Dealing with abuse/misuse refers to content or conduct which may be illegal, harmful, offensive or inappropriate e.g. under a company's Acceptable Use Policy. In this respect, Signatories should, for the services they offer:

· Provide a clear and simple process whereby users can report content or behaviour which breaches the service's terms and conditions

· Implement appropriate procedures for reviewing user reports about images, videos, text and other content or behaviour;

· Provide clear information to users on all available report and review procedures;

· Place and review regularly links to these reporting options in appropriate areas of the service (for example where users view user-generated content or interact with other users) and provide guidance on what to report;

· Place links to relevant child welfare organizations or specialist providers of advice (e.g.: about anorexia or bullying) and other confidential helplines/support services in appropriate areas;

· Ensure that moderators who review user reports are properly trained to determine or escalate content or behaviour presented to them.

4. Child sexual abuse content or illegal contact

Signatories shall

Cooperate with law enforcement authorities and other agencies, as provided for in local law, regarding child sexual abuse content or unlawful contact;
• Facilitate the notification of suspected child sexual abuse content to the appropriate law enforcement channels, in accordance with existing laws and data protection rules;

• Ensure the prompt removal of illegal child sexual abuse content once notified by national law enforcement agency

• Provide relevant additional information and/or links to users so they can make a report or obtain information about appropriate agencies or organisations that users can contact about making a report or obtaining expert advice, at national and EU level. This could include:
 ·Law enforcement agencies;
· National INHOPE hotlines;
· Emergency services.

5. Privacy and control

Signatories will continue to comply with existing data protection and advertising rules and privacy rights as set out in the relevant legal dispositions.

Furthermore, as appropriate, the Signatories will:

·   Manage privacy settings appropriate for children and young people in ways that ensure they are as safe as is reasonably possible;

·   Offer a range of privacy setting options that encourage parents, children and young people to make informed decisions about their use of the service and the information they post and share with others online. These options should be easy to understand, prominently placed, user friendly and accessible;

·   Take steps, where appropriate and in accordance with legal obligations, to raise user awareness of different privacy controls enabled by services or devices and enable users to use these as appropriate;

·   Make reasonable efforts to raise awareness among all parties, service, content, technology and application providers, including public bodies, of industry good practice in relation to the protection of children and young people online.

6. Education and Awareness

Signatories will provide appropriate information and engage in awareness raising activities. The purpose of these activities will be to:

·   Educate children and young people and give them up to date information to manage their access and settings in relation to content, services and applications, adding support where possible to existing initiatives and partnerships[iv];

·   Provide advice about features of the service or functionality that are available to allow parents to improve the protection of children, such as tools to prevent access to certain types of content or service;

·   Provide links to other sources of relevant, independent and authoritative advice for parents and carers, teachers, and for children;

·   Provide access to information that will help educate parents, carers, teachers and children about media literacy and ethical digital citizenship, and help them think critically about the content consumed and created on the Internet;

·   Encourage parents and teachers to use this information and talk to their children/pupils about the issues arising from the use of online services, including such topics as bullying, grooming and, where relevant, cost management.

7.   **Implementation and reporting**

·   An ICT Principles Stakeholder Group will be established to support and to take forward the ICT Principles. Membership of the ICT Principles Stakeholder Group will reflect the multi-stakeholder community of interests;

·   Each company/group drafts its own roadmap and targets on how to implement the Principles;

·   The ICT Principles Stakeholder Group early in process will reflect and consider on key issue pertaining the challenges of setting benchmarks and individual targets;

·   Within 6 months, each company/group will present its roadmap and targets at the first possible meeting of the ICT Principles Stakeholder Group;

·   18 months after signature of the Principles, each company/group presents a report to the ICT Principles Stakeholder Group outlining how it has met each of the applicable Principles;

·   Subsequent reports would be every 24 months (this is necessary to take account of the product cycle of companies);

·   The Signatories prepare a consolidated report on the basis of individual company/group reports, including their initial benchmarks;

·   An independent expert/panel is appointed by (and financed by) the ICT Principles Stakeholder Group to carry out a review of the consolidated report. The review evaluates company/group achievements by assessing the received reports against the benchmarks set earlier.

The Signatories commit to comply with these Principles and if a member does not seek to apply the Principles, it may be subjected to exclusions.

The Signatories will carry out a review of the Principles every 24 months and this will be done in consultation with the ICT Principles stakeholder group.

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[i] For the purposes of this document "children and young people" are defined by the relevant jurisdiction of the service provided, noting that definitions can vary within each Member State depending on the area of law concerned
[ii] INSAFE: European network of Awareness Centres promoting safe, responsible use of the Internet and mobile devices to young people
[iii] INHOPE: the International Association of Internet Hotlines
[iv] Eg TeachToday and INSAFE initiatives