Committee of Ministers: Recommendation on Empowering Children in the New Information and Communications Environment

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The lives of children and young people are changing. Demographic trends, varying family structures, flexible working conditions and so on are evidence that modern European childhood is shifting. Considering the number of hours that an average child spends in front of various screens is far higher than the time they spend in front of their educators or their parents, children and young people are clearly moving away from the consumption of traditional forms of media towards more creative and personal (peer-to-peer) forms of communication to express and inform themselves.

In this context, and in response to a call for action by the 46 Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe during their Third Summit in Warsaw in May 2005 to step up action on children's media literacy, and in particular their active and critical use of all media as well as their protection against harmful content, the Council of Europe prepared a Recommendation on empowering children in the new information and communications environment (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 27 September 2006).

One of the underlying features of this Recommendation is that Internet technologies and services are positive tools which should not be feared (especially by educators such as teachers and parents) but rather embraced. This is why the Recommendation underlines the importance of ensuring that children become familiarised and skilled regarding these technologies and services from an early stage in their lives as an integral part of their school education.

The Recommendation stresses that the process of learning and skilling children to be active, critical and discerning in their use of these technologies and services must be done hand-in-hand with learning about how to exercise (and enjoy) their rights and freedoms on the Internet. The human rights context of this learning and skilling process is of key importance in helping children to understand how to communicate in a manner which is both responsible and respectful to others.

By acquiring knowledge and skills in this way the Recommendation asserts that children will be able to better understand and deal with content (for example violence and self-harm, pornography, discrimination and racism) and behaviours

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(such as grooming, bullying, harassment or stalking) carrying a risk of harm, thereby promoting a greater sense of confidence and well-being.

In developing and facilitating information/media literacy and training strategies to empower children in the ways mentioned above, member states are encouraged to work together with other key non-state actors, namely civil society, the private sector and the media, in order to better understand the motivations and conduct of children on the Internet and to help children's educators (parents and teachers) to recognise and to react responsibly when faced with content and behaviour carrying a risk of harm.

Recommendation Rec(2006)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on empowering children in the new information and communications environment (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 27 September 2006 at the 974th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

http://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Rec(2006)12&Sector=secCM&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75

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