Committee of Ministers: Declaration on Protecting the Dignity, Security and Privacy of Children on the Internet

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On 20 February 2008 the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a Declaration on protecting the dignity, security and privacy of children on the Internet. This Declaration focuses on the content that children can create about themselves on the Internet, including all forms of traces that they can leave online (logs, records and processing). "We are determined to ensure that our children can use the Internet safely, and that the Internet cannot be used against them", said Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

The Committee is aware that children will use the Internet as an important tool in their day-to-day activities. The ways in which children can leave relevant personal data on the Internet (such as the recently emerged so-called ‘networking’ websites) are increasing and children are often unaware of the consequences of their usage. As a result, children’s activities become traceable and this may expose them to criminal activities by others, such as the solicitation of children for sexual purposes or otherwise illegal or harmful activities, e.g. discrimination, bullying, stalking and other forms of harassment. Furthermore, the Committee is aware of the tendency of several types of institutions, such as educational establishments and prospective employers, to seek information about children and young people when deciding on important issues concerning their lives. As a result, children have to be protected against the possibility of their private information becoming permanently traceable by others on the Internet.

Therefore, the Committee has invited the Contracting States to explore the feasibility of removing or deleting such content, including its traces, within a reasonably short period of time. The Committee has also declared that there should be no lasting or permanent accessible record of content created by children on the Internet, which challenges their dignity, security and privacy. The Committee is aware that in some cases content may become damaging only after the individual has reached adulthood. That is why the Committee has declared there should be no accessible record that renders them vulnerable either now or at a later stage. However, this declaration does not preclude the existence of an accessible record for use in the context of law enforcement.

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The Declaration took note of two World Summits on the Information Society (Geneva, 2003 – Tunis, 2005), which reaffirmed the commitment to effective policies and frameworks to protect children and young people from abuse and exploitation through information and communication technologies. It also noted the mandate of the United Nations Internet Governance Forum, in particular, to identify emerging issues regarding the development and security of the Internet and to help find solutions to issues that arise from the use and misuse of the Internet and which are of concern to everyday users.

The Declaration also makes reference to the need to inform and educate children of the enduring presence and risks presented by the content they create online. This matter is specifically dealt with by Recommendation Rec (2006) 12 of the Committee of Ministers on empowering children in the new information and communications environment. This Recommendation asks Contracting States to promote children's skills, well-being and related information literacy. Finally, the Council of Europe has devised the interactive game 'Wild Web Woods'. With this educational tool, children can learn to identify and resist virtual threats, whilst surfing the web in security.

Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on protecting the dignity, security and privacy of children on the Internet, adoptedon 20 February 2008

https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Decl(20.02.2008)&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=0001&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75

Recommendation Rec(2006)12 of the Committee of Ministers on empowering children in the new information and communications environment, adopted on 27 September 2006

https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Rec(2006)12&Language=lanEnglish&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75

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