Committee of Ministers: Recommendation on rights of the child in the digital environment

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On 4 July 2018, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a new Recommendation on Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment. The Recommendation opens with a Preamble recognising that the digital environment is complex and subject to rapid evolution, and is reshaping children's lives in many ways, resulting in opportunities for and risks to their well-being and enjoyment of human rights Furthermore, the Committee of Ministers is conscious that information and communication technologies are an important tool in children's lives for education, socialisation, expression and inclusion, while at the same time their use can generate risks, including violence, exploitation and abuse.

The Committee of Ministers makes a number of recommendations to member states, including a recommendation that member states review their legislation, policies and practice to ensure that they are in line with the recommendations, principles and further guidance set out in the new Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment, which are annexed to the Recommendation. Moreover, member states should promote the implementation of the Guidelines in all relevant areas and evaluate the effectiveness of the measures taken at regular intervals, with the participation of relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, member states should require business enterprises to meet their responsibility to respect the rights of the child in the digital environment and to undertake implementing measures, and encourage them to cooperate with the relevant state stakeholders, civil society organisations and children.

The new Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment run to 15 pages, and include 124 sections. A number of provisions in the Guidelines concern the media and online media, and should be briefly mentioned. Firstly, information on the rights of the child, including in the digital environment; news; health; information on sexuality, among other useful resources to them, is particularly important. In particular, member states should ensure that children are able to locate and explore public-service media and high-quality content likely to be of benefit to them. Secondly, where member states make provisions on the media, these should involve children in active forms of communication, encouraging the provision of user-generated content and

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establishing other participatory schemes. Attention should also be paid to children's access to, and presence and portrayal in, online media.

Thirdly, in relation to digital literacy, member states should promote the development of digital literacy, including media and information literacy and digital citizenship education, in order to ensure that children have the ability to engage in the digital environment wisely and the resilience to cope with its associated risks. Digital literacy education should be included in the basic education curriculum from the earliest years, taking into account children's evolving capacities. Fourthly, member states are encouraged to cooperate with media, with due respect for media freedom, with educational institutions and other relevant stakeholders, to develop awareness-raising programmes aimed at protecting children from harmful content as well as preventing their involvement in illegal online activities.

Lastly, member states should encourage all professional media outlets, and public service media in particular, to be attentive to their role as an important source of information and reference for children, parents or carers, and educators in relation to the rights of the child in the digital environment, with due regard to international and European standards on freedom of expression and information and freedom of media.

Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of the child in the digital environment, 4 July 2018

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