European Liberal
Forum
PAPERS

Recommendations for a safer Internet for children in the EU

renew europe.

Abstract:

One in three internet users in Europe is a child (persons younger than 18 years old), spending on average 6,5 hours online daily. But while the internet offers children endless opportunities to study, shop and meet online, it was never designed with children in mind, leaving children vulnerable to a range of issues, including sexual abuse, privacy infringements and commercial targeting. Renew Europe calls upon EU policy makers to take the interests of children into account from the start of EU law-making, to ensure children can enjoy the digital world in a safe way. Renew Europe calls on the Commission to include the following recommendations in its work programme and future legislation.

About Renew Europe Group

The Renew Europe Group is a coalition of progressives, liberals, democrats and reformists, that make up the largest centrist group in the history of the European Parliament. Brought to you from the European Liberal Forum, this new reference series aims to disseminate Renew Europe Group positions to the wider liberal family, policymakers and industry stakeholders, civil society and the general public. While, at the same time, the position papers will raise awareness on a number of issues and policy sectors, from sustainability and climate change, to democracy and the rule of law, human rights and fair competition.

This document is a position paper adopted by the Renew Europe group in the European Parliament on 5 February 2020, which ELF is publishing with Renew Europe permission. The opinions expressed in the document do not preclude any further developments in the group's positions on that topic. It remains the sole propriety of the Renew Europe group.

About ELF

The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the official political foundation of the European Liberal Party, the ALDE Party. Together with 47 member organisations, we work all over Europe to bring new ideas into the political debate, to provide a platform for discussion, and to empower citizens to make their voices heard. Our work is guided by liberal ideals and a belief in the principle of freedom. We stand for a future-oriented Europe that offers opportunities for every citizen. ELF is engaged on all political levels, from the local to the European. We bring together a diverse network of national foundations, think tanks and other experts. In this role, our forum serves as a space for an open and informed exchange of views between a wide range of different EU stakeholders.

Introduction

One in three internet users in Europe is a child (persons younger than 18 years old), spending on average 6,5 hours online daily. But while the internet offers children endless opportunities to study, shop and meet online, it was never designed with children in mind, leaving children vulnerable to a range of issues, including sexual abuse, privacy infringements and commercial targeting. Renew Europe calls upon EU policy makers to take the interests of children into account from the start of EU law-making, to ensure children can enjoy the digital world in a safe way. Renew Europe calls on the Commission to include the following recommendations in its work programme and future legislation.

Opportunities for children

1. Digital literacy

Children should be empowered to navigate the online world in a safe way. The European Commission should, together with children, digital service providers and other stakeholders, develop a set of key learning outcomes and a training programme that help children, parents and caregivers across Europe to develop digital resilience. The programme would include training on how to protect yourself against, among other things, grooming, harassment, cyberbullying and harmful content, as well as how to recognise disinformation. The training programmes should be implemented by Member States and made available to all children.

2. Child safety-by-design

Children should be able to easily understand and use digital services, including online gaming, their functionalities and terms & conditions. Consequently, future legislation should lay down that if a digital service is likely to be used by children, it should ensure an age-appropriate design, content and advertising. As a minimum, this means that no 'nudge techniques' are used to encourage children to provide more personal data than necessary to use the service and that the highest level of privacy is turned on by default. This has to be strictly enforced by data protection authorities.

3. Child-friendly alert and redress mechanisms

Children need to be able to easily flag harmful content or file a complaint against any type of abuse. They should always be able to speak to a person in procedures, if help is needed.

4. Child and youth voices

The Commission should seek to consult with young citizens and child specialists from across the EU, on a structural basis, on how to create a safer environment online.

Protection of children

5. Implementation and enforcement of legislation

Several measures set out in EU law, including Directive 2011/93/EU on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography and the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), are currently in place that could benefit children online. However, the implementation and enforcement of these measures is lacking. The Commission has to continue infringement procedures against Member States to ensure that these measures are fully implemented and enforced. Also future legislation must be strictly enforced from the first day after entering into force.

6. Strengthen the existing network of National Safer Internet Centres

These Centres already do excellent work in awareness raising, in running a hotline and in helping children online, but should be given the necessary tools and funding to do more in those areas. They should coordinate with the EU centre and other bodies to address the wider issues facing children online.

7. Strong public-private partnerships

The EU, Member States and industry should work together closely to develop industry recommendations, codes of conduct as well as standards on ageassurance and age-appropriate design. Public-private partnerships, including through

strengthening the EU alliance to better protect minors online, Better Internet for Kids and WeProtect Global Alliance, as well as initiatives of the online gaming industry are key to ensuring a safe internet for children.

8. Risk assessment & mitigation

Digital service providers shall assess whether their services are accessed by, likely to be accessed by, or impact children. They shall identify, assess and mitigate systemic risks for children stemming from the functioning and use of their services by putting in place effective and proportionate measures. Digital service providers with more than 45 million users in the European Union should be prohibited from profiling children for commercial practices, including through personalised advertising.

9. Family care

Digital services, including online gaming, that are accessed by, likely to be accessed by, or impact children should ensure that parents and caregivers can easily find information to make them fully conversant with the risks of their services and aware of possible strategies, including parental controls, to support and protect their children online

Reinforcing the fight against child sexual abuse (CSA)

10. An independent EU centre to combat and prevent child sexual abuse
should be tasked with:

- being the first contact point to coordinate cross-border investigations into CSA cases together with Europol, national law enforcement, national hotlines, part of the INHOPE global network;

- receiving and analysing CSA reports from online service providers

- assisting Member States, in cooperation with relevant stakeholders such as NGOs, academia and medical doctors, with the full implementation of EU legislation, particularly the design of preventive programmes, including programmes for potential offenders as well as with the design of victims-assistance programmes.

11. Obligations for digital services providers:

- Digital service providers should, to the best of their abilities, use state-of-the-art technology to detect CSA online and remove child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

- The technologies used should never lead to any form of mass surveillance.

- Those technologies should only be used for the exclusive purpose to detect child sexual abuse online.

- Those technologies should be evidence based, they should be proven necessary and proportionate and should be accompanied with adequate fundamental rights safeguards, human review and effective redress mechanisms. In order to ensure that the technology used is as privacy friendly as possible, they should be submitted to a prior consultation and also periodically reviewed by the relevant data protection authorities. When it concerns new technologies, they should be subject to pre-authorisation.

- Digital service providers should also submit those technologies to regular audits and reviews by independent experts to ensure fundamental rights of users are respected.

- Digital service providers should always submit detected child sexual abuse to the EU-centre, so that every occurrence is followed up and properly prosecuted by law enforcement authorities.

- Transparency and annual statistics: to the highest degree possible, digital services providers should provide information to the users that they will detect CSA and remove any CSAM. They should also provide for detailed statistics about the technologies used and materiel detected.

12. Respect for fundamental rights

The future legislation against CSA, including the EU center, and other measures to ensure a safer internet for children should include effective and proportionate measures, in full respect of the Charter of Fundamental Rights & existing EU data protection law.

ELFpapers
RenewEurope
@RenewEurope
/europeanliberalforum
@eurliberalforum

liberalforum.eu
reneweuropegroup.eu