Recommendation of the Council
on the Protection of Children Online

2012 Version

Following the revision of this Recommendation by the Council on 31 May 2021, this version is no longer in force. For access to the official and up to date texts of OECD Legal Instruments as well as other related information, please consult the Compendium of OECD Legal Instruments at https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/.

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BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

THE COUNCIL,

HAVING REGARD to Article 5 b) of the Convention on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development of 14 December 1960;

HAVING REGARD to the Recommendation of the Council concerning Guidelines Governing the Protection of Privacy and Transborder Flows of Personal Data [C(80)58/FINAL], the Recommendation of the Council concerning Guidelines for Consumer Protection in the Context of Electronic Commerce [C(99)184/FINAL], the Recommendation of the Council Concerning Guidelines for the Security of Information Systems and Networks - Towards a Culture of Security [C(2002)131], the Seoul Declaration for the Future of the Internet Economy [C(2008)99], and the Recommendation of the Council on Principles for Internet Policy Making [C(2011)154];

RECOGNISING that a growing number of children are spending increasing time online, starting at younger ages, and that Internet technologies and access devices are evolving rapidly, facilitating the access of children to the Internet and changing their online usage patterns;

RECOGNISING that while the Internet brings major benefits to children in terms of education, self-expression, and social development, its use also carries a spectrum of risks to which children are more vulnerable than adults;

RECOGNISING the importance of co-operation and information sharing by all stakeholders in the development, implementation and assessment of policy approaches to the protection of children online;

RECOGNISING that the protection of children online requires policies which both reduce online threats to foster a safer Internet for children and enable children to protect themselves from threats that remain;

RECOGNISING that even if regional and local cultural differences impact the evaluation of online risks to children, international dialogue and co-operation has proven valuable to establish more effective policy approaches for an inherently global medium like the Internet:

On the proposal of the Committee for Information, Computer and Communications Policy:

I.   **AGREES** that, for the purpose of this Recommendation:

   i) "Children" encompass every human being below the age of eighteen years, recognising that a lower age threshold might be appropriate in providing certain legal protections; "parents" encompass children's parents and carers;

   ii) The "protection of children online" encompasses content risks, contact risks, risks related to children as consumers as well as information security and privacy risks faced by children on the Internet;

   iii) "Stakeholders" encompass governments, businesses, civil society and the Internet community and other entities involved in maintaining a safe Internet and educating children.

II.   **AGREES** that this Recommendation does not cover risks related to child sexual abuse images online and the sexual exploitation of children which are matters addressed by other international instruments;

III.   **RECOMMENDS** that in formulating policies for the protection of children online, governments and all other stakeholders take into account the following principles:

a. Empowerment

   i) Policies to protect children online should recognise that all stakeholders share responsibility both to make a safer online environment for children by reducing online threats to children, and to support the primary role of parents in evaluating and minimising risks of harm to their children online as well as offline;

ii) Policies to protect children online should empower children and parents to evaluate and minimise risks and engage online in a secure, safe and responsible manner.

b. Proportionality and fundamental values

i) Policies to protect children online should be proportionate to the risks, effective and balanced. They should maximise the protection against online risks faced by children without restricting the opportunities and benefits of the Internet for children as well as for other users.

ii) Policies to protect children online should not undermine the framework conditions that enable the Internet to operate as a global open platform for communication, innovation, economic growth, and social progress. The consistency of policies designed to protect children online with other economic and social Internet policies should be carefully assessed prior to adoption and implementation.

iii) Policies to protect children online should be consistent with fundamental values of democratic societies as they apply to all individuals including children. In particular, they should support freedom of expression, privacy protection and the free flow of information.

c. Flexibility

i) Policies to protect children online should be age-appropriate and accommodate developmental differences and special vulnerabilities. Where age-based restrictions are established, all stakeholders should strive to ensure that such restrictions are respected.

ii) Policies to protect children online should be technology neutral to ensure their sustainability in a dynamic environment characterised by rapidly evolving technologies and patterns of usage.

IV. **RECOMMENDS** that, in formulating policies at the domestic level for the protection of children online, governments:

a.   Demonstrate leadership and commitment to protect children online by:

i) Adopting clear policy objectives at the highest level of government;

ii) Identifying government bodies with responsibility and authority to implement these policy objectives and to co-operate across borders;

iii) Developing policies that are inclusive of all stakeholders and rely on a mix of public and private, voluntary and legal, awareness raising, educational and technical measures to protect children online.

b.   Support a co-ordinated response from all stakeholders by facilitating and, as appropriate, establishing:

i) An open dialogue in order to foster synergies, benefit from the expertise of all stakeholders including parents, educators and the children themselves and take into account their perspectives;

ii) Partnerships to develop self- and co-regulatory programmes characterised by transparency and accountability.

c.   Foster consistency and coherence of domestic child online protection initiatives across public and private stakeholders. This could include:

i) Ensuring the enforcement of existing protection measures;

ii) Clarifying the categories of risks and harmonising the terminology used to inform the public;

iii) Promoting mutually reinforcing policy measures rather than accumulating isolated or stand-alone, and potentially inconsistent, initiatives.

d.　　　Foster awareness raising and education as essential tools for empowering parents and children by, for example:

　　　i)　Integrating Internet literacy and skills in school curricula with a focus on risks and appropriate online behaviour;

　　　ii)　Training educators and encouraging other stakeholders to educate and raise awareness of children and parents;

　　　iii)　Regularly measuring the evolution of their Internet literacy.

e.　　　Support evidence-based policies for the protection of children online by:

　　　i)　Facilitating the further development of a robust empirical and analytical basis, including undertaking longitudinal surveys, with a view to support policy development and implementation through better understanding Internet usage by children, risk evolution and awareness;

　　　ii)　Conducting regular impact assessments of policies, including of co- and self-regulatory initiatives.

f.　　　Encourage the development and adoption of technologies for the protection of children online that respect the rights of children and the freedom of other Internet users. This could include:

　　　i)　Fostering further research on privacy protective, interoperable and user friendly technical measures, including parental controls and age verification systems;

　　　ii)　Promoting the use of technologies which enable children to protect themselves against online risks;

　　　iii)　Fostering the assessment of the potential impact of such technical measures in relation to fundamental values such as freedom of expression, privacy protection and the free flow of information, as well as the implementation of appropriate safeguards;

　　　iv)　Promoting labelling schemes attesting the trustworthiness, quality and user friendliness of such technical measures.

V.　　　RECOMMENDS that, at the international level, governments:

a.　　　Strengthen international networks of national organisations dedicated to the protection of children online such as networks of hotlines and awareness centres and, where appropriate, facilitate an expansion of their role.

b.　　　Share information about national policy approaches to protect children online and in particular develop the empirical foundations for quantitative and qualitative international comparative policy analysis. This could include:

　　　i)　The adoption of a shared statistical framework enabling international comparability of indicators on children use of the Internet, risk prevalence, awareness by children and parents of these risks and of how to respond to them, as well as policy impact and efficiency;

　　　ii)　The harmonisation of the statistical definition of risks and related policy responses as well as children's age groups used for statistical purposes;

　　　iii)　A shared commitment to regularly update official quantitative data within a timeframe that takes into account the dynamic development of the Internet and of its uses by children.

c.　　　Support regional and international capacity building efforts to improve policy and operational measures to protect children on the Internet, including the pooling and sharing of successful education and awareness raising tools.

d.　　　Better co-ordinate work by the various international and regional organisations and bodies which play a role to support government efforts in this area, including OECD, Asia-Pacific Economic

Co-operation, Council of Europe, European Union, Internet Governance Forum, ITU, Organisation of American States, and involve non-governmental stakeholders where appropriate.

VI.   **INVITES:**

-   Members and the Secretary-General to disseminate this Recommendation to all stakeholders and other international organisations;

-   Non-Members to adhere to this Recommendation and collaborate with Members in its implementation.

VII.   **INSTRUCTS** the Committee for Information, Computer and Communications Policy to review this Recommendation and its implementation and to report to Council within five years of its adoption and thereafter as appropriate.