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Safer Internet Day 2009: Commission starts campaign against cyber-bullying

More than half of Polish teenagers and 34% of Belgian and UK youngsters have been the target of cyberbullying – harassment over internet sites or mobile messages. That is why the European Commission launches at Safer Internet Day 2009, a campaign including a short video, empowering teenagers to keep control when online. Young people bullied online must be able to report such abuse quickly and easily at the click of a button. The pan-European campaign encompasses all EU Member States, Iceland and Norway. It is part of the Commission's Safer Internet programme ([IP/08/1899](#)), which, among other things, works with the social networking companies to fight cyberbullying.

What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is repeated verbal or psychological harassment carried out by an individual or group against others. It can take many forms: mockery, insults, threats, rumours, gossip, "happy slapping", disagreeable comments or slander. Interactive online services (e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging) and mobile phones have given bullies new opportunities and ways in which they can abuse their victims.

What makes cyberbullying different from "traditional" bullying?

As they grow up, young people interact and communicate with each other more and more when adults are not around. This is especially true when teenagers are online as they may use the latest websites or other ways of communicating which adults may not know about or where they are free from adult supervision. Cyberbullying also differs from face-to-face bullying as:

- Young people can hide behind the anonymity the internet provides.

- Messages posted on the internet can be seen by a very wide audience almost instantly – very different to writing nasty messages on the back of a school book.
- Young people do not feel as responsible for their actions when they post messages online, as they would in real life. They are not afraid of being punished for their actions.
- Young people are often afraid or reluctant to report incidents, as they fear that adults will take away their mobile phone, computer and/or internet access.

How widespread is the problem?

Cyberbullying, usually carried out by peers, is one of the risks which young people are most likely to encounter online. Research reported in a [public consultation on online social networks](#), conducted in July 2008, shows that this new risk is a problem in most European countries:

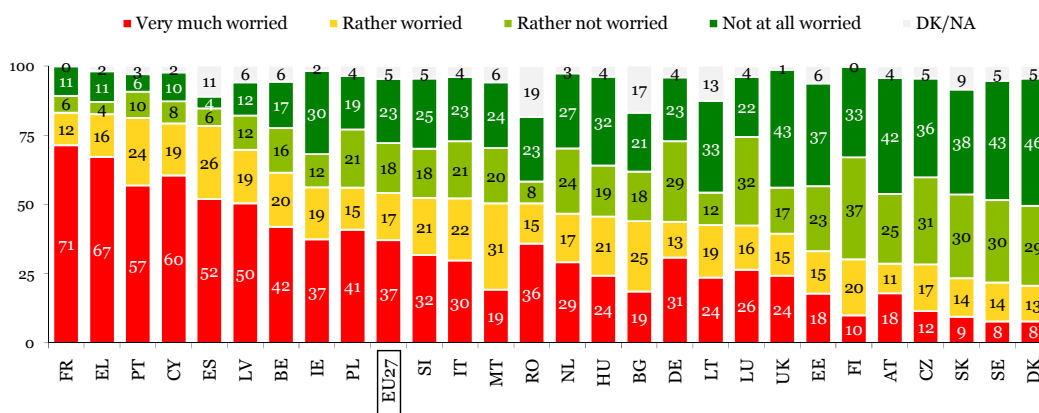
- **34.3% of Belgian teenagers** have been bullied via internet or mobile phone, according to [research results](#).
- **52% of Polish Internet users** aged 12-17 have been exposed to abuse on the Web or via mobile phones. **47%** of the child respondents have been called crude names while 21% have been humiliated or mocked according to the Nobody's Children Foundation and Gemius Agency in Poland.
- In research conducted for the **UK** Department for Children, Schools and Families, **34% of 12-15 year olds** reported having been cyberbullied.
- In **Ireland**, a survey carried out by the National Centre for Technology in Education showed that threatening or aggressive text messages and posting photos or videos that were intended to embarrass teenagers among 14 to 18 years old are the most common form of cyberbullying.

How concerned are parents about cyberbullying?

According to the [2008 Eurobarometer survey](#), 54% of European parents are worried that their child could be bullied online ([IP/08/1899](#)).

More than 80% of parents in **France, Greece and Portugal** are concerned that their children could be bullied when they use the Internet or a mobile phone. Parents in **Denmark, Slovakia, Sweden and Finland** seem more confident about their children's safety as over 69% are not at all, or not very, worried about their children being cyberbullied by their peers (see annex).

Chart 25: How worried are you that your child could be **bullied online by other children**?



How many people use social networking sites in Europe?

In the past year, the use of social networks has grown 35% in Europe. 56% of the European online population visited social networking sites last year and the number of regular users is forecast to rise from today's 41.7 million to 107.4 million in the next four years. In 2007 **9.6 million British** belonged to the country's social networking community, with **8.9 million** in **France** and **8.6 million** in **Germany**.

In **Europe users spend 3 hours per month** on average on social networking sites according to comscore.com. The **UK** registered the highest usage in 2007 with an average of 5.8 user hours spent on such sites. This was a significantly heavier usage level than in **France**, which averaged 2 hours per month, or **Germany**, with 3.1 hours and **Spain** and **Italy** with 1.8 hours.

In parallel with well known companies based in the US like Facebook, Youtube and Myspace, European companies are doing very well in this sector. Finland-based Habbo Hotel claims 80 million registrations. Belgian-based Netlog has 17 million while the French based Skyrock 18 million, StudiVZ.de in Germany 14 million and Dailymotion 11 million.

Other European sites include Hyves in the Netherlands, Arto.dk in Denmark, Nasza-klaza in Poland, One.it and Giovani.it in Italy, and Zap.lu in Luxembourg.

Are parents monitoring or restricting what their children do on social networking sites?

62.8% of European parents said that they would not allow their children to create a profile in an online community according to the [2008 Eurobarometer survey](#). Parents in **Spain, France, Ireland, Italy and Luxembourg** proved to be the strictest with more than 70% of parents forbidding their children from registering on social networking sites. 71% of **Latvian** parents were more relaxed and would allow their children to create online profiles, followed by 53.3% in **Estonia**, 51.3% in the **Czech Republic** and 50.2% of Swedish parents (see annex).

At least half of parents said they talk to their children about their online activities. They also take precautionary measures such as not allowing their children to disclose personal information (92%) or to talk to strangers (83%) online.

Why is the European Commission dealing with cyberbullying?

The Commission thinks that European action is necessary because social networks connect people across borders, making it harder for local or even national measures to tackle this problem alone.

More specifically, cyberbullying is a new problem emerging rapidly in most EU countries. To tackle it in an efficient way, it is important to be aware of and share good strategies which are being developed in different European countries and also come up with common strategies, like the video clip produced for this year's Safer Internet campaign.

What activities will take place under the Safer Internet campaign?

A 30 second video clip on cyber-bullying has been produced for the European Commission. It is available in all EU languages plus in Norwegian and Icelandic. The video will be **broadcast** on public and private **TV** channels all over Europe throughout 2009 and will kick off on Safer Internet Day (10 February).

The clip will also be shown during the Berlin International Film Festival Berlinale on big screens at the Potsdamer Platz and Sony Center from 10 to 15 February.

A longer version of the video will also be **posted on the internet on sites popular with teenagers such as:** Arto, Skyrock, Piczo, Habbo Hotel, Myspace UK, YouTube, Dailymotion, BeboIE. A "making of" is also available online.

Advice for teenagers on how to stay online in all EU languages is available on www.keepcontrol.eu and also on the websites of [INSAFE network awareness centres](#).

What is the main message of the Commission's Safer Internet video clip?

It shows how young people can be empowered to deal with online dangers.

The video clip shows a **young girl who is victim of cyberbullying, but fights back and reports the problem** to her social networking site. Her appearance goes through different stages of **transformation**, reflecting the way that bullies are **distorting her photo on a website**. Finally, the girl **takes control** by pressing the **"Report abuse"** button available on the social networking site and everything comes back to normal.

"Block bullying online! Keep it fun, keep control" is the final message of the video. It shows young people that there are solutions to the problems they may face on the Internet. The video closes with the website and phone number where teenagers can find **help and advice in their country**.

The video clip can be seen, in full, at: http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/video_prod_en.cfm?type=detail&prodid=8520&src=1

...or as a shortened version at:

http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/video_prod_en.cfm?type=detail&prodid=8517&src=1

How does the Commission help teenagers stay safe online?

The Commission's Safer Internet Programme helps empower youngsters online by providing them with the information, skills and tools to deal with risks online. At a national level this is done with the help of the [INSAFE network of awareness raising centres](#), and help lines

In addition, the Commission has encouraged social networking companies to self-regulate in order to keep young people safe online. An agreement on child safety has already been signed by mobile operators in the EU in 2007 ([IP/07/139](#)). Today at Safer Internet Day 2009, 17 major social networks active in Europe have signed the first European agreement of its kind to prove their commitment to the same goal. The Commission will closely monitor the implementation of this agreement and will assess actions that have been taken after a year.

What are the main steps taken by the industry when signing this agreement?

The industry participants recognise their responsibility towards child safety and commit to work towards 7 principles:

1. Raise awareness of safety messages in a prominent, clear and age appropriate manner.
2. Ensure that services are age appropriate for the audience. If a social networking site targets teenagers over 13, it should be difficult for people below that age to register.

3. Empower users through options which make their online presence safer. This can be done for example by making sure that the full online profiles and contact lists of website users who are registered as under 18 are set to "private" by default and not searchable. This will make it harder for people with bad intentions to get in touch with the young person.
4. Provide an easy to use and accessible "report" button, allowing users to report inappropriate contact or conduct by another user by just one click.
5. Respond to notifications of illegal content or conduct.
6. Enable users to employ a safe approach to privacy (in particular through privacy setting options visible at all times, so that users can easily work out if just their friends, or the entire world, can see what they post online).
7. Review illegal or prohibited content/conduct through moderation tools, filtering software or community alerts.

The companies commit to inform the Commission about their individual safety policies and how they will put the principles in place by April 2009. The sites will also put information about their safety policies online.

How many social networking sites have signed this agreement?

17 social networking sites active in Europe have signed the agreement. These are: Arto, Bebo, Dailymotion, Facebook, Giovani.it, Google/YouTube, Hyves, Microsoft Europe, Myspace, Nasza-klaza.pl, Netlog, One.it, Skyrock, StudiVZ, Sulake/Habbo Hotel, Yahoo!Europe, and Zap.lu.

What is the Commission's role in bringing the companies together to sign the agreement?

The Commission has helped to bring internet companies of very different sizes and background, NGOs (Adiconsum, Childnet International, CHIS, e-Enfance, Save the Children Denmark) and researchers (from EUKidsonline network) together around one table for the first time because it believes that self- or co-regulation is the most efficient way to keep children safe online.

The Commission has provided a platform for dialogue, such as the Safer Internet Forum, which took place in Luxembourg in September 2008 and gathered world experts on this topic ([MEMO/08/587](#)).

The Commission has also provided political support and practical help. The full involvement of the social networking companies has been essential to the development of an agreement which the companies will find useful and will implement.

The Commission will continue to provide support and visibility for this initiative and will monitor its results.

For more information

<http://ec.europa.eu/saferinternet>

www.keepcontrol.eu

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/social_networking/index_en.htm

Annex

Extracts from Flash Eurobarometer survey 2008: Towards a Safer Use of the Internet for children in the EU - a parents' perspective

Allowing activities: Creating a profile in an online community – *by country*

QUESTION: Q7A_E. Do you allow your child to create a profile online? Base: parents whose child uses the Internet

	Total N	% Allow	% Doesn't allow	% DK/NA
EU27	9627	30.1	62.8	7.1
COUNTRY				
Belgium	355	33.2	58.9	7.9
Bulgaria	405	23	57	20
Czech Rep.	423	51.3	39	9.7
Denmark	465	47.1	47.5	5.4
Germany	391	33.2	62.4	4.3
Estonia	465	53.3	30.3	16.3
Greece	250	24.4	66	9.6
Spain	354	10.2	77.1	12.7
France	380	24.2	73.2	2.6
Ireland	404	25	72.3	2.7
Italy	227	16.7	74.9	8.4
Cyprus	125	36	58.4	5.6
Latvia	414	71	22	7
Lithuania	432	32.9	58.6	8.6
Luxembourg	188	23.9	72.9	3.2
Hungary	440	39.8	48.9	11.4
Malta	220	35.5	54.5	10
Netherlands	465	43.7	52.9	3.4
Austria	383	24	63.4	12.5
Poland	448	35.5	52	12.5
Portugal	342	27.8	64.3	7.9
Romania	349	31.8	54.4	13.8
Slovenia	439	21.4	67	11.6
Slovakia	391	45.8	44.8	9.5
Finland	472	34.1	61.7	4.2
Sweden	456	50.2	39	10.7
UK	455	30.1	67.9	2

Table 24a. How worried are you that your child could be bullied online by other children? – *by country*

	Total N	% Very much worried	% Rather worried	% Rather not worried	% Not at all worried	% DK/NA
EU27	12803	37.1	17	18.1	23.1	4.7
Country						
Belgium	501	41.9	19.6	16	16.8	5.8
Bulgaria	501	18.6	25.3	18	21.2	17
Czech Rep.	503	11.5	16.9	31.4	35.6	4.6
Denmark	501	7.8	12.8	28.9	45.9	4.6
Germany	519	30.8	12.9	29.1	23.1	4.1
Estonia	500	17.8	15.4	23.4	37	6.4
Greece	502	67.1	15.5	4.4	11	2
Spain	503	51.9	26.4	6.4	4.2	11.2
France	503	71.4	11.7	6	10.7	0.2
Ireland	500	37.4	18.8	12	30	1.8
Italy	500	29.8	22.4	20.6	23.2	4
Cyprus	250	60.4	18.8	8	10.4	2.4
Latvia	502	50.4	19.3	12.4	12	6
Lithuania	501	23.6	19	11.6	33.1	12.8
Luxembourg	250	26.4	16	32	21.6	4
Hungary	503	24.3	21.3	18.5	32	4
Malta	250	19.2	31.2	20	23.6	6
NL	500	29.2	17.4	23.6	27	2.8
Austria	500	18	10.6	25.2	41.8	4.4
Poland	503	40.8	15.3	20.9	19.3	3.8
Portugal	505	56.8	24.4	9.5	6.3	3
Romania	502	35.9	14.5	7.8	23.3	18.5
Slovenia	501	31.7	20.6	17.8	25.3	4.6
Slovakia	500	9.4	14	30.2	37.8	8.6
Finland	503	9.9	20.3	36.8	32.6	0.4
Sweden	500	7.8	14	29.8	43	5.4
UK	500	24.2	15.2	16.6	42.6	1.4

Full survey available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_248_en.pdf