**Child protection on internet-issues**

Government of Montenegro has adopted “The strategy of development of information society until 2013”. This is a very important document, and with appropriate implementation, without doubts Montenegro will in short time become reference to neighbor countries regarding the development of information and communication technologies and the accessibility of services for the most of our citizens. Ministry for information society and telecommunication, as the responsible government body for the implementation of topics and activities planned in the mentioned strategy will try to deal in a smart way to make more accessible and close the information and communication technologies to all segments of the population.

As children and young people are part of this interested group, and as we know that this structure of population is the most interested in using this information and communication technology resources and especially of the internet, the protection and safeguarding of this part of population which are the most sensitive, is our duty and obligation.

Internet use has grown considerably in Montenegro in the last decade following the trend of the other part of Europe. Information technology now forms a core part of the formal education system in Montenegro as in many countries, ensuring that each new generation of Internet users is more adept than the last. If we analyze the recent comparative work (EU Kids Online) on internet use across 27 European countries, it reveals that there have been substantial changes between 2005 and 2008 for example. In 2005, 70% of 6-17 year olds in the European Union (EU) used the Internet. By 2008, this rose to 75% on average. The most striking rise has been among younger children – by 2008, 60% of 6-10 year olds were online. There has also been a substantial difference between 2005 and 2008 concerning location of use. In 2005 use of the Internet at school was as common as home use. By 2008, 6-17 year olds in all EC countries were much more likely to use the Internet at home (65%) than school (57%), and 34% are now going online using their own computer. Data from similar study reflects the increased ‘online prevalence trend’ with 85% overall using the Internet at home and just under half of all those children having internet access in their bedrooms. This privatized use is growing rapidly; however, the principal variation in this use is accounted for by socioeconomic status and age more than gender.

There are cross-national differences however in internet access ranging, and taking in consideration that a similar survey has not been performed in Montenegro, we don’t have precise data, but having in consideration that Montenegro has mobile phone penetration above the European average and a good internet penetration, we have to believe that Montenegro children and young people follows this average percentages of online-internet use.

Most young people manage to navigate the information highway safely but as unfortunately some encounter exposure to harmful materials and abuse, and as users are getting younger and the Internet is embedded in their daily life with more than one hour online per day this is becoming of particular concern. Risks are numerous, such as giving out personal information, seeing pornography, meeting an online contact offline, seeing violent or hateful content etc. Risk represents the use of mobile phone which is widespread among children and young people and an increasing number access the Internet via a mobile phone. Young people also make extensive use of the Internet using interactive services such as games, Social Networking Sites and instant messages, which have become increasingly available as mobile phone applications. Technologies around social networking sites allow relatively easy access to children by online groomers, with children having frequent and open access to such sites at younger ages. Once in contact with a child, online groomers can use various incentives to encourage the child’s participation, towards the goal of sexual contact.

This facilitates the use of Internet by some adults to access children and young people for the purposes of sexual abuse. The definition of an online groomer is someone who has initiated online contact with a child with the intention of establishing a sexual relationship involving cyber-sex or sex with physical contact. According to some surveys, Internet sex offender behavior includes the construction of sites to be used for the exchange of information, experiences, and indecent images of children; the organization of criminal activities that seek to use children for prostitution purposes and that produce indecent images of children at a professional level, and the organization of criminal activities that promote sexual tourism.

The Internet has greatly facilitated this process in the virtual world in terms of geographic location, speed of contact and range of number of contacts. Groomers will often offer incentives such as money, gifts, concert tickets, modeling contracts, day trips, phones and games as part of the grooming process or to encourage young people to produce and send images of themselves.

These are the reasons why it is important to empower and develop children’s ability to protect themselves. The development of filtering systems should be based on the notion that children are active participants able to understand and, when adequately informed, direct their choices in a positive way. A filtering system should be able to propose safe alternatives whenever a page is blocked. It cannot replace a parent or an adults’ support but could nonetheless help guide a younger child by encouraging and stimulating his/her reflection and critical thinking, thus allowing for the acquisition of some elements relating to self-protection.

Other steps in safeguarding the children are that Internet service providers and software companies should develop voluntary codes of conduct to prevent abuse, and to make available inexpensive software to block pornography from computers. Technical solutions too should be offered to parents, through the use of filtering software packages that can block certain types of online content. And various organizations should provide internet portals that are specially designed and monitored to give children safe links to legitimate websites.

One of the difficulties for Montenegro in combating child sexual abuse and the commercial sexual exploitation of children via the Internet is the international, multi-jurisdictional nature of the crime and its cross border activity. Because cyberspace has no national boundary, each country applies its own legislation within its national border in this way creating disparity in legal approaches. Most countries already have laws protecting children, but as they are not centralized, it is not that effective against Internet abuse. In order for this to be enacted, agreement about definitions needs to be in place. At present definitions of ‘child’ are not synchronized across national boundaries, let alone what constitutes internet abuse. Whilst the law in most countries provides a distinction between the regulation of adult material and that depicting children in recognition of the vulnerability of minors, the task of defining a ‘child’ is complex. Montenegro is not spared of this negative trend, so undertaking of regional training and capacity building programs to law enforcement agencies are expected.