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Protecting children online – Statement Julia von Weiler
Clinical Psychologist, Director of Innocence in Danger e.V. Germany

Innocence in Danger Germany not only conducted a study as to how child and adolescent victims are being cared for in Germany but is also running a prevention model scheme on internet with adolescents. Innocence in Danger is also a member of eNACSO (European NGO Alliance for Child Safety Online thematic network).

Apart from the necessity of access blocking – on a global level – it is of uttermost importance to reach out to children and adolescents in order to protect them. The technological side is one part of the solution but NOT – in the least – the main part. The European Council Framework decision is very clear about access blocking in regard to child abusive images and all member states need are called upon to take all measures necessary in order to prevent the distribution of abusive images

But more steps are needed:

1. Identifying Online victims and providing them with proper care.

Here we need to distinguish three types of victims:

- children and adolescents who have been sexually abused and whose images are being circulated online.
- Children and adolescents who have been groomed (manipulated) by adults online in order to produce so called self generated images via webcam
- Adolescents who have sexual encounters, take pictures or make films and distribute them – thus also producing self generated child abusive images

We need to train counsellors and therapists on how to treat these children and adolescents properly – maybe generating a European or International curriculum which then will be applied in the respective countries.

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2. Online counselling – as a first step to getting help is also needed. A study conducted by Catarina Katzer, University of Cologne showed that only 8% of those adolescents who have been sexually harassed online will turn to an adult for help. Online counselling will make this step much easier and might then lead them into “face to face” sessions.
3. At the same time we need to reach out to children and adolescents with prevention programs. Innocence is running a prevention model scheme called “smart user” where we actually go back to basics: talking with adolescents one on one, listening to them and inviting them to become part of the solution. But it is, obviously, also very much necessary to teach parents what is going on and how to deal with issues arising from using the internet:
Here a European Curriculum would also make sense which can then be translated by each respective country according to need and cultural background.

It is high time to join forces and efforts and take a step forward instead of having the “wheel reinvented” all over the place!

Thank you for your attention.

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