
Empowering Families on the Internet

Protecting children and ensuring a safe and healthy Internet experience must be at the forefront of Internet governance discussions. The CP80 Foundation echoes the Council of Europe’s call at February’s Consultations in Geneva for “continued and even more focus on the ordinary Internet user, and, in particular, on the protection and empowerment of children on the Internet.”

This paper describes IGF’s established commitment to children and proposes the CP80 Internet Channel Initiative as an internationally viable best practice for properly guaranteeing free expression and simultaneously protecting children from harmful content online.

Respecting Children’s Rights

The founding principles and documents of IGF consistently refer to internationally accepted declarations on human rights and stress that these same rights must be extended to the Internet. The CP80 Foundation supports these efforts and proposes that the rights of children ought to receive especial consideration in the development of Internet governance.

The Geneva Declaration Geneva recognized young people as “the future workforce and leading creators. . .” and declared our commitment to “ensuring that the development of information and communication technologies (ICT) applications and operation of services respects the rights of children as well as their protection and well-being.”¹

Two facts become clear in light of this principle. First, that such a commitment was so strongly worded indicates a respect for children’s rights based in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child: “The child shall enjoy special protection, and shall be given opportunities and facilities, by law and by other means, to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity.”²

Second, these rights, to one degree or another, are currently being violated by ICTs. In spite of its unprecedented opportunities for education and connectivity, the Internet values the freedom of expression over the rights of children to develop in a “normal manner.” Violent, hateful, and pornographic content can negatively affect the mental, moral, spiritual, and social development of children around the world. Yet these materials

¹ Principle 11, The Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action. WSIS, December 2003.

² Principle 2, Declaration of the Rights of Child. Proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 1386(XIV) of 20 November 1959.

are just as easily accessible to children as content that facilitates education and healthy development.

Social Responsibility of Internet Governance

Protecting children begins at home; parents are responsible for monitoring and educating their children about the value and danger of the Internet. Parents are not, however, alone in this endeavor. “The widest possible protection should be accorded to the family and to enable it to play its crucial role in society.”³ Internet governance bodies and principles can facilitate this protection and assist families in fulfilling its role.

The Tunis Agenda indicated that there are “cross-cutting international public policy issues that require attention and are not adequately addressed by the current mechanisms.”⁴ In the struggle to balance free expression and the protection of children nations and families are often faced with limited and inadequate options. Some (nations and individuals) feel they are forced to choose between the Internet and their values.

The inability to adequately address the social dilemmas of the Internet has been one of the key failings of Internet governance bodies. The IGF rightly recognizes the Internet is a social tool and has the opportunity to foster the creation of new mechanisms that will adequately address this issue. Under established international norms the “best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration”⁵ as we consider how best to fulfill the social responsibility inherent in Internet governance.

A Suggested Best Practice: The Internet Channel Initiative

The CP80 Foundation proposes the Internet Channel Initiative as the appropriate framework for both ensuring free expression and empowering families to effectively play their role in society.

Currently, all content for a specific protocol uses the same port for transmission. For example, whether a user is browsing children’s games, violent content, or pornography on the Web, you use port 80, the HTTP port. The Internet Channel Initiative proposes that an Internet governing body, accountable to the general world public, designate content specific ports that zone the Internet into Community Ports and Open Ports. Community Ports are designated to contain only content appropriate for all ages. Open Ports are designated for all legal content.

The appropriate Internet governing body will establish policies for content specific ports, making it illegal for content deemed inappropriate for minors to be routed via the Community Ports. Publishers of mature content must sanitize their Community Port presence and use the Open Port ranges to publish any legal content.

3 Principle 57, The Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action. WSIS, Geneva, December 2003.

4 Item 60, Tunis Agenda for the Information Society. Tunis, November 2005.

5 Principle 2, Declaration of the Rights of Child. Proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 1386(XIV) of 20 November 1959.

Zoning might also be accomplished by leveraging future IP address schemes, such as IPv6, through allocating specific ranges for adult content and other ranges for age appropriate content.

Once content is appropriately zoned, consumers will have the ability to truly control their Internet experience. This Internet evolution will create a truly democratic Internet, where ideas are freely exchanged and the rights of every user are more effectively protected and ensured.

Cooperation Among Stakeholders: Implementation and Enforcement

Self-regulation would be ideal for addressing this issue but has so far been inconsistent and ineffective. The nature and scope of the Internet however have exacerbated the problem and are not conducive to self-regulation alone. Conversely, heavy-handed governmental regulation is not desirable. This often tips the scales in the other direction, crushing the freedom of expression underneath a government's values.

Co-regulation involves the cooperation on the part of all stakeholders to a problem and offers a feasible alternative. An initiative to zone the Internet would involve commitment and action on the part of each stakeholder in the Internet pornography problem:

National Governments, acting as the primary guarantors of human rights, must pass legislation to define which content is appropriate for Community and Open ports pursuant to existing national and community standards. National governments can also proscribe suitable enforcement mechanisms and policies to effectively implement the solution.

Internet Governance Bodies can designate which ranges of ports are available to be used for Community Port ranges and Open Port ranges and provide enforcement to ensure that ranges are used as proscribed.

Content Publishers will be required to make a simple change the configuration of their web server so that their content is served on the appropriate port ranges as specified by Internet governing bodies.

Internet Service Providers will implement the proper network tools that will enable them to offer customers the ability to choose which range of ports they want to receive.

Private Citizens must opt-in to receive the Community rather than Open ports. They must continue to educate children and employees about what is appropriate and acceptable in their environments.

This would model Australia's co-regulatory efforts to address the problem. At the Pan-European Forum "Human Rights in the Information Society: Responsible Behaviour by Key Actors"⁶ conference held in Strasbourg in 2005 the Australian model was highlighted as being particularly effective in bringing together key stakeholders including the state and the information society. The Australian government passed legislation requiring the cooperation of ISPs in protecting children. This cooperation hinged on the

⁶ Executive Summary of the Pan-European Forum – Human Rights in the Information Society: Responsible Behavior by Key Actors. Strasbourg, France, September, 2005.

development of technical solutions, empowering families to choose the level of restriction and whether or not to employ the solution.

The CP80 Foundation recognizes the difficulty of establishing an acceptable international line of what is and what is not appropriate for children and therefore presents its initiative as an opt-in choice for individual nations. Societies and nations have already drawn the line on what is appropriate for children on television, on the radio, in print, in music, and in videogames. Surely communities and nations can extend these lines to the Internet. Regardless of where Country A draws the line on what content is appropriate for children, it will be the consumer's choice in Country B to accept or block that content served from Country A based on its established line.

Conclusion

CP80 is currently present and working in several countries to pass legislation specific to the initiative. The borderless nature of the Internet, however, demands a global solution to be truly effective. IGF and other Internet governing bodies can provide the framework for an international agreement that will empower the world's families to better protect their children.