

SAFE-SI Project – Safer Use of Internet in Slovenia

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Abstract:

We all recognize nowadays that internet is a growing heap of junk. It is rich with all sorts of information, offers great learning experience, creative possibilities and amazing new way of communication. And it's fun to play with. Nevertheless, a heap of junk is the price we have to deal with, for all its beauty, accessibility, simplicity, and usefulness. During the last ten years, it has become inseparable part of our lives, bringing 'virtual' and 'real' world together into one, rendering the separation obsolete and impossible. We use this environment more and more in everyday routine; and our children are growing with it, learning and playing in its playgrounds. But, as in a 'real' world – to force the obsolete distinction for the last time, for internet *is* a real world – the playgrounds sometimes contain doggie pooh and dirty needles, and learning by errors may be painful. In our childhood, we were taught to cross the street carefully, to avoid dangerous stuff in the sand and keep our hands away from the pooh; they also warned us that we were not to follow a suspicious gentleman who offers sweets in the park, and if we were to see a flasher, we should calmly ignore him and tell mum. We can see that not much has changed, really. Perhaps it's got a little bit worse, as we generally tend to say about the world. So we need to keep telling our children about dangers and inconveniences in the world, *including* the internet, and how to avoid them. Only now we also have to tell it to the grown-ups, instructing them that world's got a bit more complicated, if indeed interesting at the same time. And that's what Internet Awareness projects are all about.

Raising awareness about unpleasant aspects of the internet has been going on from the beginning, with the particular role of National Research and Educational Networks. But with maturity, apart from being 'a heap of junk' internet has also got other attributes of real world, like deception, crime and abuse. And as the network community grew fast, a more coordinated awareness action was called for. A Safer Internet awareness network was established within the framework of the Safer Internet program of the European Union, focused on protecting children from illegal and harmful content. In Slovenia, SAFE-SI project was started with the aim to establish a national awareness node on the safe internet usage among youngsters. The project, conducted by a Faculty of Social Sciences and ARNES, promotes protection of children and teenagers using internet and new online technologies. Its prime target groups being children, parents and teachers, SAFE-SI will contribute to raising awareness of Slovenian society as a whole. To achieve this objective, we will use various means – creation and dissemination of awareness materials, workshops for teachers, public events, media presence – profiting from shared experience with other European countries through the INSAFE network.

We aim to help educate and empower internet users to be able to communicate in a safe way, to recognize and avoid internet fraud, crime, privacy abuse, and unwanted content. But we realize that awareness campaigns contain many pitfalls – media love spooky stories and so does the average consumer. Our major concern is to raise awareness

without raising fear. We need to work hand in hand with all stakeholders, including government agencies, NGO's, media and industry, to actually encourage (safer) usage of internet by exposing its positive aspects.