CRITERIA FOR POSITIVE DIGITAL CONTENT, SERVICES AND APPS FOR CHILDREN

Values and impact

Right from the start, your intended content must consider the following **values** in terms of how the content might **impact** the child.

Consider how your content, app or service can be:

- **Empowering** – enables the child to feel confident and as independent as possible in their developing abilities within a safe digital environment.
- **Engaging** – causes the child to be motivated and inspired.
- **Stimulating** – encourages the child to feel curious to learn more.
- **Safe** – provides the child with the space to explore the digital experience at minimum risk.

Checklist

Consider the basics:

- Decide target age range.
- Define objectives.
- Plan the benefits to the child.

Provide clear and transparent objectives:

- Keep the intended age range foremost in mind for the content design and interface.
- Orientate on your target group's abilities, children's cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development, and their interests at that age. Always keep in mind that every child is an individual and they can differ enormously.
- Consider social and cultural factors relevant for your context.

Develop stimulating digital experiences:

- Plan and design creative, interactive, stimulating, innovative, entertaining and/or educational elements and features.
- Provide appealing visuals that are properly attributed and labelled. Consider that graphics, sounds (voice, music and sound effects) and videos may have a stronger impact than text.

- Include appropriately challenging tasks and features; provide suitable feedback and rewards when applicable.
- Consider exchanging, sharing and embedding content through collaborations with other positive online content producers/creators.

Ensure usability:

- Consider how the content/service might be accessible through mobile devices, as well as different platforms, browsers and operating systems.
- Ensure that the navigation structure is user friendly, intuitive and adapted to the motor skills and competences of the target group.
- Plan for users not to get lost within the site/service/app; they must always know where they are and clearly marked navigation elements should be used to help their orientation.
- Provide a URL address and/or name that can easily lead children to the designated content/service/app and will not land them in unwanted or harmful domains filled with viruses and advertising if they misspell it.
- Use well-written text free of errors and suitable for the target group.
- Ensure that the children don't get lost and can easily go back to the home screen or to the previous chapter. Give them the opportunity to keep track of where they are (by marking a point in the game/story for example). Make it easy for a child to find the same content again if they want to continue their reading or game.

Develop content and services that are accessible and inclusive:

- Ensure that the needs and requirements of people with disabilities regarding vision, hearing, mobility or cognitive aspects are considered when planning, developing and producing the content/service with all participating parties.
- Consider the structure, language/text/speech, sound, images and colours of content and services. Ensure they are designed in a way to support assistive technologies and provide alternative texts/attributes.

Ensure content is reliable:

- Consider how the content/service/app will comply with the relevant legislation or regulations, for example, regarding the protection of the minors, data protection, commercial communication, copyright, and so on.
- Provide information about the provider/creator.
- Ensure contact details are easily accessed and respond within a reasonable amount of time.

- Ensure accurate and reliable content which is maintained and reviewed regularly.
- Where relevant, ensure that the offered content is true, up to date and topical.
- Offer clear information for parents and caretakers. Consider applying for and showcasing independent certification to highlight your service's child - friendliness, if applicable.

Ensure safety is a priority for the child:

- Be aware that the content is not harmful to minors: it does not contain offensive material or other harmful elements (for example, pornography, racist/violent/offending/xenophobic content, pictures or videos).
- Ensure that children are not directed to unsuitable content, such as, external websites or apps with content that is inappropriate.
- Whenever you choose to implement content from external sources, avoid automatically-provided related content or previews which do not fall under your editorial control.
- Follow the principle of safety-by-design and consider aspects of child protection online from the beginning of the production process.
- Develop an effective monitoring and moderation methodology, as well as providing effective reporting mechanisms, easy to find and use contact/help/advice or tools to report and block potentially harmful content or contact.
- Consider using age classification tools to also provide electronic age labels which make it easier for parental controls to evaluate your content/service/app correctly. Use age-rating tools provided by platforms with utmost care and responsibility in order to provide appropriate results.

Keep in mind that the privacy of children is paramount:

- Ensure that privacy laws are respected. Make sure you have checked and updated your content/service according to the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- Be careful not to gather more data than necessary.
- Provide information about privacy measures and ensure that policies are clearly visible and in a language or format suitable for the target group and their parents.
- If the data of users is processed or authorisation is needed while installing or using the app/site/service, this should be made transparent.

- Ensure that personal data is treated confidentially and exceptions (for example, for the purpose of delivering a prize) are made transparent and it is stated clearly that the data is deleted afterwards.
- If children can share their personal data, be aware that they have to actively confirm parental consent.

Sensitively develop social media elements and communication features: social networks, chat rooms, forums, guest books, video/picture sharing platforms, messengers, and so on:

- Consider specific rules and security information on how to use the features safely and if they are offered (for example, guidance on netiquette while communicating with others, protection of personal data, protection against cyberbullying, and so on).
- Encourage children to ask for parental consent before they create a user account and consider how this can be realised during the registration process.
- Ensure easy to use and find reporting mechanisms are provided (for example, an alarm button in case children need help or advice, or need to report potentially harmful content or contact).
- Ensure constant and active monitoring and moderation of user contributions to ensure that all content that may be harmful to children is deleted.

If relevant, develop the commercial elements in a responsible manner: advertising, sponsoring, online shopping, in-app-purchases, and so on:

- Ensure that regulations and laws regarding advertising and commercial elements addressing children are respected.
- Ensure that commercial elements, advertising and online shopping facilities are clearly set apart from the content, easily recognisable, labelled as such and not age-inappropriate to children (for example, no advertising or shopping for alcohol, cigarettes, plastic surgery, diet products, and so on).
- Ensure that the commercial proposition is openly communicated. Consider the notion that apps should offer no possibility to spend money unless it is in a protected area and it is clear for the target group that they should ask an adult for permission. Do not pressure children to buy additional features.
- Ensure that the commercial elements do not restrict the user's control of actions.
- Ensure that there is a financial limit to what children can spend on the website/app/service. Ensure that the payment methods require parental control.