Europe's children still unsafe in online world: EU

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A 10-year-old boy looks at a video on the internet in Berlin. European Union nations are not doing enough to protect children in the digital world and need to upgrade hotline systems, social networking awareness and age-rating, the EU executive said Tuesday.

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A European Commission report said existing recommendations to safeguard children "have been insufficient overall" and that new proposals will be issued later in the year.

With children going online from age seven, "we urgently need to step up a gear on what we do and how we work together to empower and protect

children in this ever changing digital world," said Digital Agenda Commissioner Neelie Kroes.

The report notably urged the 27 EU states to improve awareness of hotlines and privacy risks on social networking sites as well as making better use of age-rating systems to prevent the under-age sale of video games.

It said one out of three children aged 9-12, and three out of four teenagers aged 13-16, who use the Internet have a profile on a social networking site.

In June, the commission said sites such as Facebook were not doing enough to protect children from potential dangers such as grooming by paedophiles or online bullying.

Of 14 websites tested on behalf of the European Commission, just two -- Bebo and MySpace -- ensured the required controls to make sure "potential strangers" cannot gain access to profiles.

A survey earlier this year showed one in five children under 13 manage to dodge Facebook's age restriction.

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