

Child sexual exploitation and abuse online



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Acknowledging that:

1. Child sexual abuse and exploitation online is a grave violation of children's fundamental rights.
2. One in three users of digital services globally, and one in five in the EU, is a child.
3. Children's online presence increases their exposure to harmful or illegal content, cyberbullying, and harassment.
4. Online platforms can be used by offenders to sexually abuse children or facilitate offline abuse.
5. The technological development of the digital world has made it easier for perpetrators to recruit new victims beyond borders, thereby facilitating the creation of a global market for child sexual abuse material (CSAM).
6. The EU has become the largest host of CSAM globally with almost 90 % of all known URLs containing child sexual abuse material hosted in Europe in 2019.
7. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the increase of child sexual exploitation and abuse online, while it remains an under-reported crime.
8. Child sexual exploitation and abuse online can take multiple forms, including online incitement for sexual purposes (grooming), "sextortion" and 'self-generated' CSAM.
9. Many law enforcement agencies are overwhelmed by the scale of offending, are underequipped, and underfunded, and thus cannot keep up with the threat.
10. Current levels of investment from governments, online companies, and civil societies are not sufficient to address the threat, given its scale and scope.
11. Online services are designed by and for adults, rather than trained on the ways in which children experience the world, resulting in unintended consequences for children.
12. Children's rights should apply universally, and their presence and needs recognised online the way they should be offline.
13. Education and skills development regarding the use and navigation of the digital environment are paramount to fight online abuse, especially for children.
14. The EPP has been at the forefront of the EU digital policy agenda, emphasising children's rights online, through various legislative efforts that seek to protect and empower children in the online space, and to set out due diligence and accountability requirements for online companies.

15. Forthcoming initiatives such as the European Commission's Better Internet for Kids Strategy and the proposal for a Regulation to tackle child sexual abuse are promising additional avenues for action.
16. The 18th of November is Europe Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse.

The EPP Congress calls for:

1. Member States to fully implement Directive 93/2011 on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography and replacing Council Framework Decision 2004/68/JHA.
2. Further support for the creation of an independent EU Centre to combat and prevent child sexual abuse. This centre, working closely with relevant, existing organizations, should be in charge of:
 - assisting Member States in the design of preventive measures, including specific programmes for potential offenders, as well as with the design of victims-assistance programmes.
 - receiving directly and analysing reports of child sexual abuse and exploitation from online services providers, ensuring that they are actionable before forwarding them to the law-enforcement authorities.
3. Online services providers to put in place child safety and privacy-by-design and by default tools, including child impact assessments, privacy-preserving age assurance, age-appropriate terms and conditions to ensure that children's rights are fulfilled in compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and UNCRC General comment No. 25.

In this regard, online services providers should refrain from introducing features that collect personal data from children and other information that are not necessary to use their services.

4. The European Commission to ensure to include a legal obligation for online services providers to detect child sexual abuse online and remove child sexual abuse material from their platforms and report it to the EU Centre.
5. Online services providers and developers of online safety technologies to invest more in and continue to develop technology that can detect child abuse. However, online services providers should not put in place technological choices — such as end-to-end encryption, live streaming, cryptocurrency and others — without carefully analysing the impact of such technology on child safety. Any measures to address child exploitation online must not weaken the privacy, data protection and human rights of European citizens, and must protect the security and integrity of networks and digital technologies.
6. Member States to invest more in capacity-building so that law enforcement agencies can keep up with the threat.
7. Member States to assist schools to include modules in schools' curricula that enhance digital literacy, awareness of the potential abuse facing children online, and the tools that can help to keep them safe.
8. Greater international alignment to enhance global collaboration to combat the threat.

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