Forum: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Issue: Preventing the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children

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Position: Deputy President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates of the UNODC,

I am writing to introduce myself as Frantzeska Vasilogeorgi, a student in my final year of the International Baccalaureate program at the American Community School of Athens. I have been given the honour of serving as the Deputy President for the UNODC at this year's PSMUN conference.

My interest in international relations, politics, and matters of global significance has grown over time, leading me to participate in Model United Nations conferences. I began my MUN journey as a delegate in the Human Rights Council, with a goal of pursuing a career in law. This year, as the Deputy President of the UNODC, I am delighted to be part of a committee that works towards creating a safer and more secure international community, free from crime, drugs, and terrorism.

The agenda of the UNODC is composed of four enthralling topics including "Mitigating the Use of Illicit Drugs by Children and Adolescents", "Tackling Radicalisation in Prisons" and "Measures to Enhance the Protection of Whistleblowers" all greatly important to address. This study guide will introduce you to the fourth topic of "Preventing the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children" by providing key definitions, examining its varying aspects, discussing major stakeholders and organisations involved along with providing possible solutions. The prevention of online sexual exploitation of children is of utmost importance in the 21st century as the online world is constantly growing, and children are victimized through the production or distribution of sexual abuse material. Abusers often attempt to extort explicit content from children.

I am looking forward to watching you create your resolutions and debate in the committee. I strongly encourage you to conduct your own personal research on the topic, as this study guide serves as an introduction only. If you have any questions or require clarification regarding the topics or the procedure, please do not hesitate to contact me at vasilogeorgif@gmail.com.

Best Regards,

Frantzeska

INTRODUCTION

In our modern technocentric world, children spend more time online than ever before; internationally a new child is introduced to the online world every half a second[1]. Growing up in an environment with the widespread utilisation of smartphones, laptops, televisions and gaming consoles, children are provided with boundless opportunities to evolve their social networks and expand their horizons. When utilised correctly, the internet is an exceptional tool as in today's world it is deemed almost unavoidable. However, with these opportunities severe risks arise for children as they may either unknowingly self-generate or share sexually explicit imagery on account of vulnerability which may be made public without their consent due to their lack of legal education and awareness on the protection of their human rights online. According to UNIFEC, over 80% of children in 25 countries report feeling in danger of sexual abuse or exploitation online highlighting the requirement of the prevention of their sexual exploitation.

Online sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) occurs in various forms; the most prevalent one being traffickers spreading images or videos of a sexual nature or livestreaming children engaging in sexual activities for sex offenders to watch from anywhere worldwide. This victimization of children may have severe consequences on their lives including but not limited to social isolation, mental health issues, substance abuse, self-harm or suicide and increased chances of having abusive behaviours in adulthood.

Throughout demographics and across time, several efforts have been made to minimise online sexual exploitation and abuse of children; yet, the issue is not even close to being eradicated and further steps need to be taken. The roots of sexual exploitation and abuse are deeply engraved in many individuals as they take advantage of their power and children's vulnerability, dependent state or actions. The complication of this topic also arises from its interconnection with other global issues including but not limited to gender equality as according to a statement made by Brisa de Angulo, a member of the SAGE, Brave Movement's survivor board, lawyer, child psychologist, human rights activist and human rights defender, one in every four young girls get sexual abused while one in nine males does before they turn eighteen. [2]

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[1] "Protecting Children Online." *UNICEF*, 8 Feb. 2021, www.unicef.org/protection/violence-against-children-online .

[2] #creator, and #identity. "The United Nations Declares November 18 'World Day for the Prevention…" *Together for Girls*, 25 Jan. 2023, www.togetherforgirls.org/un-declares-november-18-world-day.

The United Nations has recognized this issue and declared November 18th the "World Day for the Prevention of and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence". [3] The establishment of this international day to recognise SEA has been an incredible milestone in spreading global awareness and mobilising action to prevent future acts of online sexual exploitation and abuse of children.
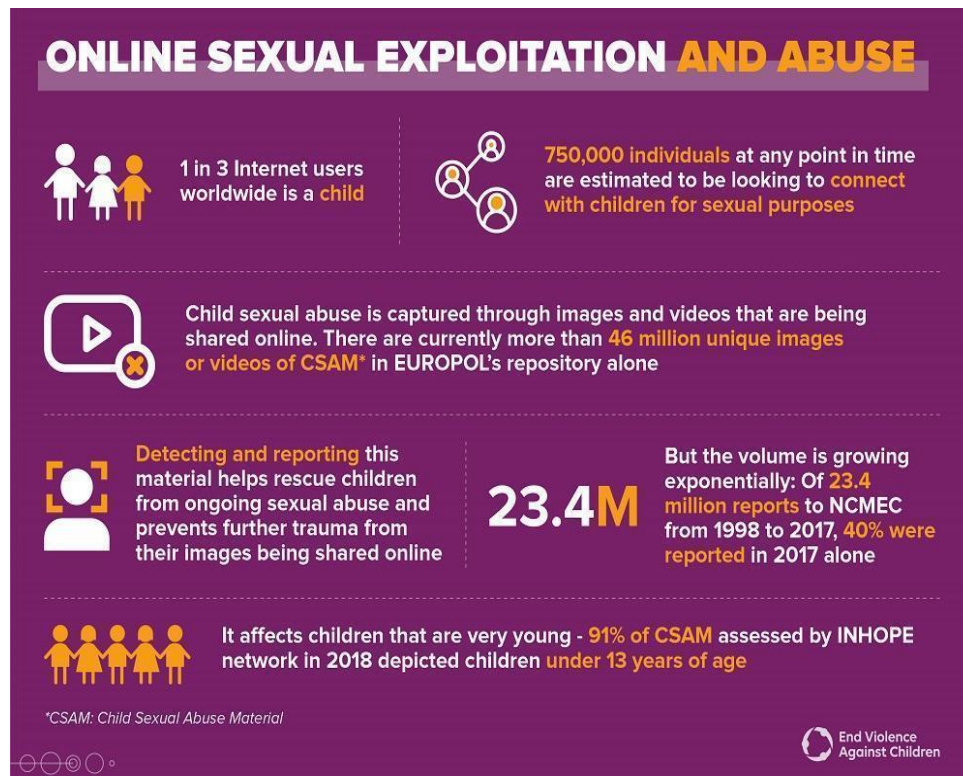

Image 1: Rates of online sexual exploitation and abuse

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Sexual Activity
Physical contact of sexual nature. [4]

Sexual Abuse
The actual, attempted or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature or of a sexual intention under forced or unequal and coerced circumstances. It is important to note that all sexual relation with a child is considered sexual abuse. However, sexual abuse

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[3] ibid

[4] *Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse - United Nations*. hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/SEA%20Glossary%20%20%5BSecond%20Edition%20-%202017%5D%20-%20English_0.pdfhttps://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/SEA%20Glossary%20%20%5BSecond%20Edition%20-%202017%5D%20-%20English_0.pdf

is a broad term serving as an umbrella term for different acts of different scales of severity. [5]

Sexual Exploitation

Any actual, threatened or attempted abuse of one's position of power, trust, or vulnerability for sexual purposes.[6]

Sexual Assault

The act of a sexual activity or the physical contact with a sexual intention when the other individual does not consent it violating their bodily integrity and sexual autonomy. It is a broader than narrower conceptions of "rape" as it may be committed by other means other than violence and it does not necessarily entail penetration.[7]

Transactional Sex

The exchange of goods, employment, money or any possible favour in exchange for sexual activities.[8]

Solicitation of Transactional Sex

The request of transactional sex even without actually committing it.[9]

Exploitative Relationship

A relationship that includes any attempted exploitation of an individual's vulnerability or dependence on the other for sexual purposes.[10]

Trafficking of people for sexual exploitation

"The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve any of the means set forth above (e.g. threat or the use of force or other forms of coercion etc.)."[11]

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[5] ibid

[6] ibid

[7] ibid

[8] ibid

[9] ibid

[10] ibid

[11] ibid

Minor/Child

According to the convention on the rights of a child[12] an individual under the age of 18 regardless of the age of consent locally. In the reporting for SEA, the term child or minor is interchangeable when referring to an individual under the age of 18.

Perpetrator

An individual or a group of people who commits an act of SEA or any other crime or offence.

Informed Consent

The approval by both participants for an act to be committed. However, consent is often not enough; it must be deemed informed since individuals are required to understand the nature of what they are consenting to. Therefore, with informed consent, individuals must be given all the relevant facts at the time consent is given in order for them to be given the opportunity to evaluate and understand the consequences of an action. They are also required to be aware of their right to refuse/deny their engagement in an action. In the case of children, when obtaining informed consent their evolving capacities must be taken under consideration and consent should also be taken from a parent or guardian.[13]

Sextortion

Sextortion is the child sexual exploitation that occurs primarily online and usually involves non-physical kinds of coercion such as blackmail while targeting children for money, or sexual engagement.[14]

Mental Health

An individual's mental health includes their psychological, emotional and social well-being. It assists in determining how one handles stressful situations, their decision-making process and interpersonal relationships.[15]

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[12]"Convention on the Rights of the Child." *OHCHR*, https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child .

[13] "Consent and Coercion Discussed." *The University of North Carolina at Pembroke*, 26 Feb. 2018, https://www.uncp.edu/resources/title-ix-clery-compliance/sexual-misconduct/consent-and-coercion-discussed#:~:text=Explicit%20approval%20and%20permission%20to,used%2C%20there%20is%20no%20consent.

[14] "Sextortion: It's More Common than You Think." *ICE*, https://www.ice.gov/features/sextortion#:~:text=Financial%20sextortion%20occurs%20when%20a,sextortion%20is%20on%20the%20rise .

[15] "About Mental Health." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 28 June 2021, https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm#:~:text=What%20is%20mental%20health%3F,others%2C%20and%20make%20healthy%20choices.

Poverty

Poverty refers to the lack of financial resources to meet one's basic needs including food, clothing and shelter and it is one of the driving forces of online sexual exploitation and abuse of children.[16]

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In order to tackle this issue and prevent future violations one must examine the varying facets of online sexual exploitation and abuse of children by identifying the different stakeholders and factors that have resulted in the rapid increase of SEA cases.

Types of online sexual exploitation and abuse

Although all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse of children are legally prohibited and it contains different forms of violence, the different criminal offences within it range.[17]

Online grooming

Child grooming may be described as the practice by which an adult, often described as the abuser or trafficker, utilises the internet to actively manipulate, trick or force a child into engaging in a sexual activity or the intention to do so. This happens in different stages starting with the selection of the victim. According to a study by Winterns and Jeglic in 2017[18], perpetrators select their victims based on their appeal or attractiveness (based on the perpetrators preferences and desires), vulnerability, and easy access to them. Following the selection of the victim, they proceed by contacting them to become familiar with them, often seeking a friendship. They often gain information about the victims such as their hobbies, family status and interests via different social media platforms, in order to discover a common ground with them and seem relatable. During their communication the perpetrator examines the risk of being caught by asking the victim questions pertaining to their family situation, if the child's parents go through their electronic devices etc. This is the most typical approach while others may adopt different

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[16]*Poverty and Sexual Violence - PCAR*. https://pcar.org/sites/default/files/pages-pdf/poverty_and_sexual_violence.pdf .

[17]Katharina.kiener-Manu. "Cybercrime Module 12 Key Issues: Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse." *Cybercrime Module 12 Key Issues: Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*, https://www.unodc.org/e4j/zh/cybercrime/module-12/key-issues/online-child-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse.html.

[18] "Apa PsycNet." *American Psychological Association*, American Psychological Association, psycnet.apa.org/record/2017-05669-006.

methods as research has shown that grooming does not happen in a linear path. However, the end goal is always to manipulate and control the victim into sexually exploiting them.

Live streaming of abuse

Live streaming is another type of online sexual exploitation and abuse; it refers to the live broadcasting on online chat rooms, video games or social media platforms. Abusers may be criminalised for their active participation in the livestreaming of sexual acts, the planning of these acts or an exhibited effort to convince another individual to manipulate or actively sexually abuse a child. There have been several cases of individuals performing or encouraging children to perform sexual acts on livestream for others to watch. One example is Ian Watkins who was convicted for child sexual exploitation and abuse after he motivated a mother to sexual abuse her child over a social media platform. This highlights that several cases of online sexual exploitation and abuse do not occur for purposes of blackmail or financial benefits but rather the gratification of the abusers' interests. Although cases of children being taken advantage of for financial purposes are also highly prevalent. This was especially prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic as there were various cases of family members forcing children to perform sexual acts on live stream or family members performing sexual acts on the children themselves have been recorded for the exchange of money from viewers.[19]

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying may take various forms, such as spreading rumours, sending abusive messages, publishing humiliating images or videos, or creating fake accounts to harass others. It may constitute as another type of online sexual abuse when it includes the unauthorized release of sexually explicit photographs or videos of a minor. This occurs when children are blackmailed, bullied, or misled into making sexually explicit photographs or recordings, which are then used to ridicule, humiliate, or exploit them.[20]

Factors putting children at risk

Although all children are at risk of exploitation online, there are certain factors concerning the behaviour or background of individuals that render them as more vulnerable placing them at risk.

Factors that have been identified as driving forces between this financial incentive to sexually exploit children include job instabilities, poor economic

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[19] "What Is Live-Streamed Abuse?" *INHOPE*, inhope.org/EN/articles/what-is-live-streamed-abuse.

[20] Canada, Public Safety. "Government of Canada." *Canada.ca*, / Gouvernement Du Canada, 21 Apr. 2022, www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/campaigns/online-child-sexual-exploitation/online-dangers-cyberbullying-online-child-sexual-exploitation.html.

standards, high unemployment and high poverty rates.[21] A major concern that arises is that in certain countries this is recognised as a contribution to the family. In the Philippines, abusers have justified these acts by claiming that the children were merely contributing towards the family's needs as the money they gain is utilised for their basic necessities such as food. Seeing as the children are of young age, vulnerable and in many cases grow up in an environment where this is normalised, they are not given the chance to understand their right to refuse resulting in them carrying guilt and shame and doing as they are told.[22]

COVID-19 pandemic

The outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic significantly fuelled the rise in sexual exploitation and abuse of children internationally. In September of 2020, the closure of school affected 827 million children globally. This results in limited time spent outside one's house resulting in children spending an increased amount of time on the internet; either on social media, gaming, live streaming, the utilisation of online chats, or sharing images. This was done for their personal entertainment but also as an attempt to maintain their social circle while staying connected with friends and family.[23] So, although the internet was of great benefit during this time, it also put children at higher risk of various forms of sexual exploitation and abuse as adult supervision of internet activities was rather limited especially since many parents provided unrestricted access to the internet.[24] This rapid increase of online sexual abuse cases is evident from reports that suggest an increase of 10.6 million cases of children online SEA from 2018 to 2021 hence during the covid-19 pandemic.[25] This is further supported by a study conducted by Associate Professors Michael Salter and Tim Wong through interviews of law enforcement officers and frontline responders internationally. They reported that during the covid-19

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[21] "Risk Factors." *National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE)*, safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/human-trafficking-americas-schools/risk-factors. https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/human-trafficking-americas-schools/risk-factors

[22] Bicker, Laura. "Philippines Sees a Pandemic Boom in Child Sex Abuse." *BBC News*, BBC, 29 Nov. 2022, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-63658818.

[23] *Global Threat Assessment 2021 - WEPROTECT Global Alliance*. www.weprotect.org/global-threat-assessment-21/.

[24] ibid

[25]"Covid-19 and Children." *UNICEF DATA*, 3 June 2022, data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/.

pandemic there were increased cases of online grooming, live-streaming of abuse materials and child pornography.[26]

Additionally, according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), during the covid-19 pandemic, cases of sexual exploitation and abuse were more likely to involve family members so the lockdown measures as a result of the pandemic trapped children in often hostile environments.[27] It has been evident that several cases of online grooming and live streaming involving child sexual exploitation and abuse involve family members for financial purposes. The COVID-19 lockdown causes children to often feel trapped with their abusers. Trusted adults to many children such as teachers, school counsellors or health workers were not in regular contact with them making it difficult to notice possible behavioural changes or potential warning signs of online sexual abuse and exploitation in order for them to report offences.

Furthermore, the pandemic caused disruptions within the system as in many regions policing capabilities were affected. Specifically, according to Netclearn's 2022 report law enforcements' capacity to investigate online child sexual exploitation and abuse fell during the pandemic. This is further supported by Interpol as they stated that throughout the pandemic much fewer reports reached the police and many ongoing investigations progressed with much difficulty.[28]

Poverty

Perpetrators tend to target victims that are highly vulnerable or lack power in terms of gender, race, income, immigration status or other reasons. They specifically target individuals who are not likely to inform adults about the abuse or report it to the authorities.[29] People living in poverty and lacking

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[26] *Research Report the Impact of COVID-19 on the Risk of ... - UNSW Sites.* www.arts.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/eSafety-OCSE-pandemic-report-salter-and-wong.pdf.

[27] "About Us." *National Center for Missing & Exploited Children*, www.missingkids.org/footer/about#:~:text=The%20National%20Center%20for%20Missing,exploitation%2C%20and%20prevent%20child%20victimization .

[28] Richardson, Matt, et al. "Global Threat Assessment 2021." *WeProtect Global Alliance*, 4 Sept. 2022, www.weprotect.org/global-threat-assessment-21/.

[29] "About Us." *National Center for Missing & Exploited Children*, www.missingkids.org/footer/about#:~:text=The%20National%20Center%20for%20Missing,exploitation%2C%20and%20prevent%20child%20victimization.

economic power and resources are at greater risk for sexual violence.[30] Their lack of options frequently traps them in dangerous conditions and relationships in which they may be reliant on their perpetrators for basic necessities such as shelter, food, medicine, transportation, healthcare, childcare, and others. Due to economic desperation and a lack of alternatives, children from low-income households may be more susceptible to exploitation since cyber predators often offer them money or other inducements in exchange for sexual images or acts. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly worsened this phenomenon seeing as an additional 88 million to 115 million people were pushed to extreme poverty so by extension cases of sexual abuse and exploitation also increased. Many of these families that experienced or still are experiencing financial difficulties are not as able to recognise and stand for their rights or seek for help when they do get victimised.[31]

Lack of strict control online

Once users reach the age of 16 or 18, some platforms introduce certain features and functionalities not available to younger users; these include direct messaging and the ability to see adult content. Consequently, many children self-declare fake ages online to help them gain access to these features. According to a survey conducted by the Advertising Standards Authority 83% of 11 to 15-year olds whose internet usage was monitored registered on a social media platform under a false age. Over 40% of children signed in various websites stating that they were over 18 with one even claiming to be 88.[32] This results in them viewing inappropriate ads and images or entering online chats with individuals much older than them resulting in their possible exploitation.

Social Isolation

Children having poor mental health as a result of social isolation, family disintegration, bullying, depression or other mental illnesses are more likely to be victims of online sexual exploitation and abuse. Individuals experiencing social isolation either as victims of bullying or family disintegration often seek refuge in individuals they find online. Consequently, they explore various social media platforms or online chat websites where they get the chance to speak to people from diverse backgrounds anonymously. When children are isolated, they may be less likely to have an adult around to monitor their internet activity, hence increasing their vulnerability to online SEA. Hence, traffickers have the opportunity to approach emotionally vulnerable children

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[30]*Poverty and Sexual Violence - PCAR*. pcar.org/sites/default/files/pages-pdf/poverty_and_sexual_violence.pdf.

[31]ibid

[32] "More than 80% of Children Lie about Their Age to Use Sites like Facebook." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 25 July 2013, www.theguardian.com/media/2013/jul/26/children-lie-age-facebook-asa#:~:text=The%20survey%20found%20that%2083,even%20claiming%20to%20be%2088.

anonymously while posing as friendly, caring children of similar age, hoping to establish relationships with them. Over time, children find comfort in the traffickers as they conveniently provide them with the time and comfort they lack and desire.[33]

Effects of online SEA

The online sexual exploitation and abuse of children is a heinous offence that can have serious and lasting effects on the victims. It is important to recognize and understand the impact that this type of abuse can have on children.

Psychological trauma

One of the most significant effects of online sexual exploitation and abuse of children is psychological trauma. Children who are victimized in this way often feel shame, humiliation, and powerlessness, resulting in feelings of isolation and separation from friends, family, and the community. This can lead to long-lasting impacts on their mental health and well-being. They may develop depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, which can have a significant impact on their quality of life.

Disrupted family and personal relationships

Online sexual exploitation and abuse can also result in disrupted family and personal relationships. The exploitation and abuse may lead to emotions of shame and guilt, resulting in sentiments of alienation and mistrust of others around them. Children may also find it difficult to form healthy relationships and may struggle with intimacy and trust issues as they grow older.

Damage to educational and career prospects

Victims of online sexual exploitation and abuse may also suffer from a damaged educational and career prospects. The psychological trauma resulting from the abuse may cause poor mental health, which can result in an inability to focus and perform well academically. This may lead to difficulties in completing education, gaining employment, and overall career prospects.

Physical harm

The online sexual exploitation and abuse of children can also cause physical harm. Children may be coerced into performing sexual acts, which can lead to physical injury and harm. They may also be exposed to sexually transmitted infections and other health risks associated with sexual abuse.

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[33] "Resource Centre." *RESPECT*, respect.international/exploiting-isolation-offenders-and-victims-of-online-child-sexual-abuse-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/.

Challenges faced in preventing online sexual exploitation and abuse

Governments

One of the main challenges that governments face in preventing online sexual exploitation and abuse of children is the issue of jurisdiction. With perpetrators often operating across international borders, it can be difficult for governments to pursue and prosecute them. Additionally, many governments have limited resources for investigating, prosecuting, and supporting victims of these crimes. Balancing the need for security and privacy with the need to prevent and detect online abuse is another challenge faced by governments. Many governments have enacted laws and policies that allow them to access user data and communications in the name of national security, but these measures can also be used to infringe on civil liberties and invade privacy.

Law enforcement agencies

The proliferation of the internet has made it easier for perpetrators to access child sexual abuse material and groom children online. Law enforcement agencies have been facing the challenge of identifying these offenders and bringing them to justice. The volume of data and complexity of investigations often makes it difficult for them to track down offenders. In some countries, limited resources, lack of specialized training and legal frameworks that are outdated or don't recognize newer forms of online sexual exploitation pose significant limitations.

Internet service providers (ISPs)

ISPs are responsible for hosting, transmitting, and storing content on the internet. One of the biggest challenges they face is the lack of incentives to invest in and implement effective measures for detecting and preventing online abuse. While some ISPs have taken steps to address this issue, others have been slow to act. Balancing the need to protect user privacy with the need to prevent and detect abuse is another challenge faced by ISPs. Identifying and removing illegal content without infringing on freedom of expression can also be difficult and may require a careful balance between the two. They may also have limited resources to monitor content, detect illegal activities, and report them to the relevant authorities.

Social media companies

Social media companies have been criticized for not doing enough to prevent online sexual exploitation of children. Even though they have terms of service that prohibit such activities, enforcement of these policies is challenging. Automated detection technologies may not be effective in identifying content that is not explicitly sexual or when perpetrators use disguised or coded language. Social media companies have also been criticized for not investing enough in human resources and technology to prevent the spread of illegal content on their platforms.

Children and parents

One of the biggest challenges children face is the lack of knowledge and awareness of online risks and how to protect themselves. Many children and young people may not realize that their online activities can put them at risk or may not know how to recognize and report abuse. Fear of stigma or punishment for reporting abuse or seeking help is another challenge faced by children and young people, which can prevent them from seeking the support they need. Lack of support and empowerment to recognize and resist online abuse is another challenge.

Parents and caregivers have an important role to play in protecting children from online sexual exploitation and abuse, but they also face several challenges. One of the biggest challenges is the lack of knowledge and awareness of online risks and how to protect their children. Many parents and caregivers may not be familiar with the latest online technologies and may not know how to monitor and supervise their children's online activities. Balancing children's privacy and autonomy with their safety and protection is another challenge faced by parents and caregivers, as they may need to strike a delicate balance between allowing their children to explore and learn online, while also protecting them from harm.

Children and parents face challenges in navigating the digital world, as the internet is constantly evolving, and new risks emerge frequently. Communication between parents and children about online safety can be limited, and sometimes this makes the problems they both face even worse.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Australia

In 2010, Australia created the eSafety Commissioner to lead efforts to safeguard children from online dangers, including online sexual exploitation and abuse. The Commissioner collaborates with government agencies, law enforcement, the private sector, and the community to create SEA prevention and response plans. The Commissioner's main responsibilities include education and awareness seeing as the eSafety Commissioner strives to increase public awareness of online SEA hazards and offers advice and information to children, parents, and educators on how to be safe online. Secondly, value is placed on research and development since they conduct research into the nature and scope of online SEA aiming to collaborate with technology firms and other groups to create new tools and approaches to prevent SEA. Next, they have the authority to enforce Australian laws pertaining to internet

safety and collaborate with law enforcement authorities to investigate and prosecute SEA cases.[34]

France

The French Government has prioritised children's safety online as seen through the establishment of a programme called Children Online Protection Laboratory. This programme planned to call upon researchers, tech companies along with campaigners to discuss and come up with practices on the issues of digital literacy. This was essential digital literacy which is the means towards the prevention of the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children.[35]

Portugal

In February of 2021 the Portuguese president stated "The Portuguese presidency is committed to putting concrete constructive proposals on the table to help reach a common understanding and an agreement with the European Parliament as soon as possible. We are confident that the European Parliament is equally committed to an agreement very soon to combat child sexual abuse online as effectively as possible, and we look forward to a fruitful discussion in the trilogue[36]. Therefore, Portugal has made efforts to work along with the European Parliament in order to reach an agreement pertaining to changes of EU law on privacy in electronic communications aiming to put an end to the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children, which will protect the right to privacy and confidentiality with regard to the processing of personal data in data transfers in the electronic communication sector.

United Kingdom (UK)

The United Kingdom strives towards creating a safe, diverse environment for all individuals. This is why the UK government has made great efforts towards ending child exploitation and abuse. Specifically, in 2021 the UK government's home office made a public announcement that they would make a 16.3 million-pound investment towards tackling SEA online. Through its partnership with End Violence advocates, a group of diverse and influential individuals protesting against online children exploitation, the UK government has been leading international efforts and assisting the larger ecosystem to make the internet safe for children by investing in resources, techniques, studies, and technological tools to combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA). Additionally, they are working on the development of new

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[34] "What We Do." *ESafety Commissioner*, www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/what-we-do#:~:text=Our%20purpose%20is%20to%20help,advise%20on%20online%20safety%20issues.

[35] Kayali, Laura. "France's Global Push for Online Child Safety." *POLITICO*, POLITICO, 10 Nov. 2022, www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-france-child-protection-online-harmful-internet-content/.

[36] Campos, André Curvelo. "Portugal Wants Deal on EU Privacy Law to Combat Online Child Sex Abuse." *Www.euractiv.com*, EURACTIV, 23 Feb. 2021, www.euractiv.com/section/digital/news/portugal-wants-deal-on-eu-privacy-law-to-combat-online-child-sex-abuse/.

understanding about what strategies work to stop online CSEA and utilising the evidence it produces to lobby governments, business, and other important stakeholders to give online child safety top priority in their plans, spending, and operational procedures.

Europol

Europol was established on October 1st 1998 and it is an organisation headquartered in the Hague and their mission is to assist EU members in their efforts to investigate crimes within the EU as well as internationally. They value international cooperation within different nations. Throughout the years, Europol has focused on cases of drug trafficking, illicit immigration, human trafficking in all its forms, cybercrime amongst others. [37] For Europol, the rapid increase in online child sexual exploitation and abuse material (CSEM) poses a serious challenge. This means that officers responding to prospective CSEM victims must have the knowledge and training needed to act quickly in the child's best interests. Europol has released a new set of training recommendations to help these first-responding officers. The guidelines will give first responding police the skills they need to deal with delicate circumstances that arise in a victim's immediate vicinity, such as their home or school, which is frequently hidden from the public's view. These officers will have access to essential information on how to react in the best way if they come across a child they suspect is the victim of sexual abuse thanks to the guidelines' preparation of the unified standards that they may utilize in their daily work.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children is a private non-profit organisation aimed at reducing sexual exploitation and abuse of children in their efforts to prevent the victimisation of children. In order to give the general public and electronic service providers the ability to report suspected child sexual exploitation, including online enticement of children for sexual acts, extra-familial child sexual molestation, child pornography, child sex tourism, child sex trafficking, unsolicited obscene materials sent to children, misleading domain names, and misleading words, NCMEC has operated the CyberTipline, a website in which one is able to report online exploitation, since 1998. The CyberTipline report is provided to the relevant law enforcement agency following NCMEC's evaluation. Apart from that, after NCMEC analysts kept spotting the same child victims' photographs in their studies and started keeping note of which victims had already been recognized by law enforcement, the Child Victim Identification Program was established in 2002. More than 19,100 kids have been located thus far. Currently, CVIP has two goals: helping to provide information about previously identified child victims and assisting in the search for unidentified children who have been included in sexually abusive photos so that they

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[37] "About Europol." *Europol*, www.europol.europa.eu/about-europol#:~:text=Headquartered%20in%20The%20Hague%2C%20the,partner%20states%20and%20international%20organisations.

can be found and saved. The Child Victim Identification Program also offers education and training to law enforcement and attorneys on how to recognize children who have been sexually exploited.

Interpol

Interpol is an intergovernmental organisation formally known as the international criminal police organisation which facilitates global police corporations and crime control with their headquarters in Lyon, France.[38] They operate along with 195 member countries which assist in their efforts to create safer environments worldwide. They provide investigative support, forensic assistance while their expertise lies in three categories namely terrorism, organised crime and cybercrime. Their involvement in the latter occurs via their efforts to detect and prevent online sexual exploitation and abuse of children. INTERPOL has created a number of tools throughout the years to assist law enforcement agencies all around the world in identifying victims of online sexual exploitation. The "INTERPOL Child Abuse Image Database" (ICAID)15 has been accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through the Information System I since 2001. After that, ICAID was enhanced and improved, and INTERPOL began utilising the "International Child Sexual Exploitation Image Database" in 2009. The ICSE database has enabled INTERPOL to improve victim identification procedures to unprecedented levels of efficacy and efficiency. It is possible to compare the outcomes of the old and new databases.

UNICEF

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund serves under the United Nations aiming to provide humanitarian assistance towards children globally. It works alongside another 190 countries to ensure the protection of disadvantaged children from extreme poverty, all forms of violence and exploitation, war victims, children with disabilities etc. They work towards assisting children reach their highest potential allowing them to grow and expand their horizons. UNICEF has been taking action to protect children from potential sexual exploitation and abuse by assistance workers. This action includes staff training, partner screening, and providing quick response in the event of abuse. Child protection professionals, along with investigators, human resource and ethical staff, and others, play a crucial part in UNICEF's organisation-wide strategy for preventing sexual exploitation and abuse. [39]

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[38]"What Is Interpol?" *INTERPOL*, www.interpol.int/en/Who-we-are/What-is-INTERPOL.

[39] "UNICEF Mission Statement." *UNICEF*, www.unicef.org/about-us/mission-statement#:~:text=UNICEF%20is%20committed%20to%20ensuring,protect%20the%20rights%20of%20children.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
1990s	The broad use of the internet results in early concerns being voiced regarding its potential use for sexual exploitation, particularly the spreading of content depicting child sexual abuse.
2006	The United Nations passes the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography, which contains measures to prevent online child sexual exploitation.
2007	The Virtual Global Taskforce is formed as a worldwide coalition of law enforcement organisations to prevent and identify online sexual exploitation and abuse.
2007	The INHOPE network is established.
2008	The Global Alliance Against Child Sexual Abuse Online is formed.
2009	The European Union launches the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre.
2012	The European Commission and the United States Department of Justice create a global alliance against child sexual abuse online in an attempt to strengthen global standards and combine global efforts to fight online sexual crimes against minors.
2013	The International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children establishes the Global Centre for Child Protection to aid in the prevention of online SEA.
2015	The European Union implements the Directive on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.
2016	The EU established the EU Internet Referral Unit which is a specialist unit under Europol tasked with deleting content relating to child sexual abuse from the internet.
2017	The European Commision established the "Together for a Better Internet campaign aimed at promoting a safer online environment for children.
2017	Signing of the London declaration on combating online child sexual exploitation
2018	The United States passed the "Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act."

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children is a private non-profit organisation aimed at reducing sexual exploitation and abuse of children in their efforts to prevent the victimisation of children.[40] They work alongside law enforcement officers, the private industry, families and survivors to refer to cases of children that are suspected of being abused or exploited. In the United States of America, all social media companies and websites have the legal obligation to report any child sexual abuse material that may be found on their platforms to the NCMEC. Since 1998, the NCMEC created the Cybertipline, a hotline allowing the public to report suspected child sexual exploitation including the online enticement of children for sexual activities, child sexual molestation, child pornography, child sex trafficking or unsolicited obscene images sent to children. In 2018, the Cybertipline received 18.4 million reported cases of child sexual abuse material.[41] Just a few years later in 2021 they received a staggering 29 million reports. These reports are sent to over law enforcement agencies in over 140 countries. The NCMEC has created training programs, workshops and mentoring to facilitate rescues of children from these reports and assist in investigation and arrests.

Lanzarote Convention

Online grooming has been criminalised under the Lanzarote Convention and Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on Combating the Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography. Specifically, article 23 of the Lanzarote convention the "solicitation of children for sexual purposes" is prohibited. This is significant as this convention sets out to states that they should pass legislation taking measures to criminalisation of all kinds of sexual offences against children in an attempt to protect child victims and prosecute perpetrators. According to the Convention, it should be actively encouraged to report any suspicion of sexual exploitation or abuse; telephone and online helplines should be established; and the establishment of programs to assist victims and their relatives; Emergency psychiatric treatment and therapy assistance should be made available; It is necessary to implement kid-friendly legal procedures to safeguard the victim's security, privacy, identity, and reputation. Regarding prosecution, the Convention mandates that states make all sexual offenses against children crimes (including sexual abuse within the family or circle of trust, exploitation of children

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[40] "About Us." *National Center for Missing & Exploited Children*, www.missingkids.org/footer/about#:~:text=The%20National%20Center%20for%20Missing,exploitation%2C%20and%20prevent%20child%20victimization.

[41] *What Works to Prevent Online and Offline Child Sexual ... - UNICEF.* www.unicef.org/eap/media/4706/file.

through prostitution, pornography, participation in pornographic performances, corruption of children, solicitation of children for sexual purposes). The Convention calls on nations to raise the age of majority for victims of sexual offences against children in order to allow for the initiation of legal proceedings. The extraterritoriality principle envisions the potential of prosecuting a citizen for a crime even when committed abroad and provides similar standards to ensure that an efficient and appropriate penal system is put in place in all countries.

Convention on the rights of a child 1989

The convention on the rights of a child is the first legally binding agreement protecting the human rights of all children; it was signed on November 20th 1989 and it is the most widely ratified human rights agreement ever signed. [42] According to its article 19, it is made clear that all states should take measures necessary both legislative, educational and administrative in order to protect all children from all types of violence and mistreatment. All states must protect children from any forms of sexual abuse. Additionally, it states that all children must be protected from sexual exploitation for economic purposes highlighting the efforts to combat this crucial issue internationally.[43]

United Nations Resolution A/RES/54/263

At the fifty fourth session of the general assembly of the United Nations the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography was signed and put into effect on January 18th 2002. It emphasised the global concern of the growing rates of child pornography and sexual exploitation of children aiming to prevent the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children along with the protection of children vulnerable to SEA. Specifically, articles 1 through 3 emphasise that all member states should forbid child pornography hence online sexual exploitation and abuse of children.[44]

The International Association of Internet Hotlines (INHOPE)

The International Association of Internet Hotlines (INHOPE) is an international network of hotlines assisting in the fight against online sexual exploitation and abuse of children. They have created 46 hotlines in over 41 countries aimed at giving the public the opportunity to report cases of online sexual exploitation and abuse. The reports are thoroughly investigated by the INHOPE team which later remove the inappropriate videos, if necessary, in a very short period of time. Specifically, INHOPE

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[42]"Convention on the Rights of the Child." *OHCHR*, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child

[43]ibid

[44] "Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography." *OHCHR*, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/optional-protocol-convention-rights-child-sale-children-child.

found approximately 223,999 materials of a sexual nature online out of which 58% were removed in three days or less. From these cases, over 91% of them included children while 80% were female.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Establishing reporting mechanisms

Reporting mechanisms are important in identifying and prosecuting offenders. This can include hotlines, chatbots, or other forms of online reporting systems. Reporting mechanisms must be designed to be safe, confidential, and accessible to children, families, and professionals working with them. It is essential to ensure that victims and their families are aware of reporting mechanisms and know how to use them effectively.

Digital Literacy

In the 21st century, the utilisation of social media platforms has ascended to a highly substantial level making it highly favourable as a means to spread information. Through this method, younger generations would be targeted by showing advertisements as they spend a great amount of time online. Specifically, the creation of social media platforms could be prioritised as a way to spread educational content. Recognising that the roots of this issue rely on the lack of digital literacy and lack of awareness of children's rights, member states must ensure that educational reforms are implemented as a means to effectively tackle this issue. This would empower children allowing them to recognise their ability to refuse to send sexually explicit content to their abusers even in cases of blackmail. Additionally, children should be made aware of the means through which they can seek assistance either within their family, trusted adults or hotlines.

Creating legal frameworks and strengthening existing laws

Strengthening laws involves enacting comprehensive legislation that covers all forms of online SEA, with strict punishments for perpetrators. This includes laws that criminalize the creation, distribution, and possession of child sexual abuse material. Effective implementation of such laws is also critical, with proper resources for law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and the judiciary to conduct investigations, prosecute offenders, and bring them to justice.

Technology solutions

Technological solutions play a crucial role in preventing and detecting online SEA. One solution is the use of age-verification technologies that restrict access to online platforms and websites that are not suitable for children. Content moderation systems, including the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning, can detect and remove harmful material, such as child sexual abuse images, from the internet. The implementation of end-to-end encryption can protect children from online predators, preventing them from accessing and distributing such material.

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