The impact of internet and new media on the occurrence of violence against children in Europe and in Cyprus

Rossella Sala, January 2015
“Hope For Children” UNCRC Policy Center
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I would like to dedicate this paper to all the refugee and asylum seeking children living in Cyprus.

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." (F. Douglass)
1. Introduction

Information and communication technologies are now an important and positive component of modern life, an integral part of the educational and social development of children born in the digital age.

However, the rapid expansion of the Internet globally, with its increasing and instant reach to individuals, has exposed more children and young people to sexual exploitation and abuse. Rapidly developing technology has also given rise to new forms of sexual abuse and exploitation through the use of information technology devices and features. The growing number of internet users in many parts of the world has resulted in disparate levels of knowledge and awareness of the risks associated with children using internet and social media, especially in those countries, such as Cyprus, where the use of internet by children and youths is a recent phenomenon.

In this context, the negative impact of internet and social media on children can be disproportionately severe because of the disparity in knowledge and awareness amongst parents, educators and children over the related risks of using new technologies as well as children’s increased exposure to social media which can result in higher vulnerability to sexual abuse. Young children nowadays often have a more sophisticated understanding of the Internet and mobile phone technologies than their parents, and caregivers. Too many adults lack basic digital skills and knowledge of online safety tools and possible online risks for children. Researches show that awareness levels among European parents vary widely according to what country they live in: for example, Cypriot parents are the least aware of the threats their children experience online, and many Cypriot school teachers have reported not being sufficiently familiar with online technologies to educate their students about their risks.

What is even more worrying, law enforcement agencies and social services often lack resources or expertise to deal with the volume of reports of online child sexual abuse. To a certain extent, all European States lack victim-centered services for children who have been sexually exploited and many do not provide appropriate training to build capacity amongst judiciary and police units. Specialized investigative units and services trained to handle the needs of abused children also need to be reinforced. Victim identification programs, protocols to assist children at risk, and services for recovery and reintegration are often incomplete or inadequate. Criminal and evidence laws do not reflect the unique challenges of investigating and prosecuting offences related to crimes involving children. Finally, the law often struggles to evolve as fast as technologies used by child abusers worldwide. Despite almost all teenagers having a social media profile and child abuse cases being on the rise in Cyprus, only this year has a law against child sexual abuse and exploitation and child pornography, including provisions on online grooming, entered into force.

Ongoing technological developments are posing new threats to children around the world. Child pornography is increasingly circulating through peer-to-peer file-sharing platforms, cloud-based services, and video streaming. This means that child sex offenders no longer have to risk carrying

3 Ibid
incriminating evidence through customs, or store them on their computers. Instead, they can access child abuse material through online platforms that allow sharing of files without the need to download them.

In addition, an increase has been registered in the use of mobile devices by predators who use the Internet to contact and groom children on social network platforms. Facebook, chat rooms, and gaming platforms are used by groomers to contact children whom they lure with money or gifts to convince them to create and share indecent photos of themselves. In that process offenders may also resort to threats and blackmail in order to pressure children into submission.

The phenomenon known as “sexting” is also increasingly common among adolescents. Youths willingly produce pornographic images of themselves, typically to share with their current partner or with their peers in exchange for money or other “favours”. The recipients of these images, however, often share them online and they easily find their way into commercial circulation. Research shows that 88% of self-generated, sexually explicit content online was taken from its original location and uploaded to a different Internet site.4

In conclusion, the findings of this research show that these crimes cannot be tackled by each country on its own. The FBI and the United Nations have estimated that there are 750,000 predators connected to the Internet at any given moment5: in order to track them, identify victims and win the fight against child sexual abuse, effective coordination between states is needed. This paper aims to offer a perspective on national and European best practices for the prevention and prosecution of child sexual abuse on the internet, in the hope that they can be useful to lawmakers, public institutions and other stakeholders. The international community needs to establish a common legal and policy framework to criminalize harmful conducts, prosecute offenders, and rescue victims. It is the only way we stand a chance of succeeding in dramatically reducing the incidence of child sexual abuse.

2. Law and policy context in Europe

I. International legal framework against child sexual abuse online

i. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the main legal instrument for the protection of children’s rights worldwide. Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, it is now almost universally ratified (Somalia and the USA have signed the Convention but haven’t ratified it). The CRC provides a clear set of entitlements and obligations that must be applied to frame understanding of children’s rights in the context of sexual abuse and exploitation in the online/offline environment. A key element of the Convention is that it demands that the child is to be viewed as a holder of a comprehensive set of rights. Governments have obligations to take action to ensure the greatest possible safety and protection for all children in every sphere of their lives. The UNCRC contains a number of provisions specifically focused on child protection. Article 19, for instance, requires that States take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person(s) who has care of the child. The article does not limit the application of this right to abuses that are the result of state-sanctioned conduct, nor does it narrow its scope to particular manifestations of abuse. As such, there is a positive obligation on the State to protect children from exploitation committed in any space including cyberspace.

Article 34 of the UNCRC commits states to “protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse...” and to take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to that end. Article 19 seeks to protect children from all forms of abuse: “States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child”.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has affirmed the scope of article 19 to address violence through information communication technologies, including the sexual abuse of children in order to produce and disseminate child abuse images, exposure of children to harmful material, bullying, harassment or being groomed for sexual activities. This provision is reinforced by article 34, which requires States to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. The provision explicitly mentions unlawful sexual activities, sexual exploitation and pornographic performances. Moreover, the UNCRC explains that for these purposes, States must take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent, among other things, the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity. No limitations are placed on the terms of engagement. Thus, it implies that if the engagement occurs electronically it too would be a violation of the right. Additional protection is provided in articles 35 and 36, which require States to take appropriate unilateral, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction, sale or trafficking of children, and to protect children against all other forms of harmful exploitation. These provisions introduce obligations to address a broad spectrum of potential abuse in the online environment.
The UNCRC is clearly defining a child as a person under the age of 18, but when it comes to establishing the age of sexual consent there still is wide variation among different countries. Reaching a common decision on the age of sexual maturity is clearly problematic and this issue continues to prove a barrier to any international consensus in child safeguarding law. The UNCRC also contains important general principles which should be taken into account throughout all relevant legislation and measures, including the principle that the child’s best interests should be taken into account in actions which affect them. Moreover, the Convention sets up a Committee on the Rights of the Child with the task of monitoring implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by its State parties.

An Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography also entered into force in 2002. The OPSC is the only universal treaty specifically addressing this topic and it strengthens the provisions of the UNCRC in a number of ways relevant to online/offline sexual exploitation.

Article 2 of the OPSC defines child pornography as “any representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities or any representation of the sexual parts of a child for primarily sexual purposes.” Article 3.1.c requires States Parties to criminalize “producing, distributing, disseminating, importing, exporting, offering, selling or possessing for the above purposes child pornography as defined in article 2”, whether committed nationally or transnationally. It also requires States to adopt or strengthen, implement and disseminate provisions to prevent sexual offences against children. Of particular relevance to children who are at risk of exploitation online is an obligation on States to stay updated with new technologies to ensure protection. The Protocol also clarifies that a State must exercise extraterritorial jurisdiction and introduce powers of extradition.

ii. Cybercrime Convention of the Council of Europe

The 2001 Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (also known as the Budapest Convention) is the first international treaty on crimes committed via the Internet and other computer networks, dealing, among others, with child pornography and promoting international cooperation to fight cybercrime. Article 9 defines child pornography as “pornographic material that visually depicts a minor, a person appearing to be a minor, or realistic images representing a minor engaged in sexually explicit conduct.” The same Article requires States to establish as criminal offences a series of conducts if committed “intentionally”:

- producing child pornography for the purpose of its distribution through a computer system;
- offering or making available child pornography through a computer system;
- distributing or transmitting child pornography through a computer system;
- procuring child pornography through a computer system for oneself or for another person;
- possessing child pornography in a computer system or on a computer-data storage medium.

State parties may however reserve the right not to criminalize the last two conducts.

In addition to this, the Convention contains provisions regarding international co-operation, extradition, mutual assistance on collection of data and interception of traffic data.
iii. Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse

Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (known as Lanzarote Convention) is the first international instrument to tackle all forms of sexual violence against children, including abuse perpetrated within the family environment. Apart from sexual abuse, child prostitution and pornography and coercing children into participating in pornographic performances, the convention also deals with grooming and sex tourism.

According to Art.19, child prostitution is defined as “the fact of using a child for sexual activities where money or any other form of remuneration or consideration is given or promised as payment, regardless if this payment, promise or consideration is made to the child or to a third person”.

Similarly to the CoE Convention on Cybercrime and EU Directive 2011/93, the Lanzarote Convention leaves it to the State to decide whether to criminalize the production and possession of pornographic material “consisting exclusively of simulated representations or realistic images of a non-existent child, or involving children who have reached the age below which it is prohibited to engage in sexual activities with a child” according to national law, “where these images are produced and possessed by them with their consent and solely for their own private use”.

Art.21 criminalizes the act of recruiting, coercing or causing a child to participating in pornographic performances, profiting from or otherwise exploiting him or her for such purposes, and knowingly attending pornographic performances involving the participation of children.

Online grooming of children is dealt with in Art.23, which calls for the criminalization of the intentional proposal, through information and communication technologies, of an adult to meet a child who has not reached the age of sexual consent, for the purpose of committing any form of sexual abuse, where this proposal has been followed by material acts leading to such a meeting.


The Directive harmonizes EU Member States national legislations concerning criminal offences related to sexual abuse of children, child sexual exploitation and child pornography. It also lays down the minimum sanctions for these crimes. The new rules include provisions aimed at combating online child pornography as well as various forms of sexual abuse which are facilitated by the use of ICTs, e.g. online solicitation of children (grooming) for sexual purposes.

Art.5 of the Directive criminalizes the production, acquisition, possession, distribution, dissemination and transmission of child pornography. One of the most important reforms it introduces is the punishment of the act of “knowingly obtaining access, by means of information and communication

6 Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, art.20(3).
technology” to child pornography material. The maximum term of imprisonment for these offences varies from 1 to 3 years at least.

The same article explicitly criminalizes online grooming, defined as “the proposal, by means of information and communication technology, by an adult to meet a child who has not reached the age of sexual consent” for the purpose of committing sexual abuse against him or her. It is however required that the proposal be followed by materials acts in order for the adult to be criminally liable.

With regard to consensual sexual activities, the Directive leaves it to the discretion of Member States to decide whether or not certain practices are punishable where they involve persons who are close in age and in their degree of psychological and physical development or maturity, and which may be regarded as the normal discovery of sexuality.

Furthermore, the Directive sets rules to prevent pedophiles already convicted of an offence from exercising professional activities involving regular contact with children, and requires Member States to remove or block access to web pages containing or disseminating child pornography towards the Internet users within their territory.

The fact that most European States have signed and ratified the main international instruments for the protection of children is undoubtedly a source of pride for the EU. Unfortunately however, most of these treaties are not legally binding and cannot be directly applied in a domestic court. Among the four pieces of legislation cited above, only Directive 2011/93 can be applied by a national judge without the need to refer to national law. Although States ratifying an international treaty are theoretically bound by its provisions, these cannot be applied by internal courts before they are incorporated into domestic law; as a result, very often national legislations simply ignore them, neglecting to adopt the necessary legal amendments to turn them into law. In the UK, for example, the age of criminal responsibility is actually 10 years old, a provision which totally ignores the Convention on the Rights of the Child7.

II. International and European policy and practice

i. Safer Internet Programme and EU Strategy for a Better Internet for Children

The European Commission launched its first Safer Internet Programme in 1999 in order to support projects and events to empower young people online, as well as to promote industry self-regulation and international co-operation in the framework of the Digital Agenda for Europe. Following the adoption in 2012 of a "Strategy for a Better Internet for Children” the programme is referred to as Better Internet for Kids (BIK). The strategy proposes a series of actions to be undertaken by the Commission, Member States and by the whole industry value chain, with the aim of giving children the digital skills and tools they need to safely benefit from being online. These actions are grouped around the following main goals or pillars:

1. Supporting high quality content online for children and young people;

2. Stepping up awareness and empowerment;

7 Coccaro R. and others, Child Abuse Images and Sexual Exploitation of Children Online, ECPAT International, Bangkok, 2009, pag.34
3. Creating a safe environment for children online; and

4. Fighting against child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation.8

At a minimum, all Member States are expected to implement measures against Pillar 4: fighting against child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation. In many cases, individual countries undertake proactive measures to support two or more pillars and in some instances may adopt a comprehensive approach implementing all four pillars.

Over the years, the activities of the programme covered awareness raising, fighting illegal content, filtering and content labeling, involving the civil society in child online safety issues and creating a solid database of information related to the use of new technologies by young people. An important part of the programme is the Safer Internet Centres, which are present in 30 European countries. They give advice and information to children, parents and teachers. The Centres also organize youth panels that are consulted on online safety issues and development of information material. In addition, Centres hosting hotline services receive reports on online illegal content.

The BIK programme also supported a number of self-regulatory initiatives by the media and information technology industry at a European level. These include:

- The CEO Coalition to make internet a better place for kids, a voluntary cooperative coalition whose companies signatories committed to take positive action in areas such as reporting tools for users, age-appropriate privacy settings, content classification and effective takedown of child abuse material;
- The Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU, a self-regulatory agreement signed by the major social networking services providers active in Europe, which have committed to implement measures to ensure the safety of minors on their services;
- The European Framework for Safer Mobile Use by Young Teenagers and Children, which sets out a series of measures the signatories commit to implement on their services throughout Europe, including access control for adult content, awareness raising campaigns for parents and children.

Despite the actions taken in the framework of the Safer Internet Programme, the state of internet safety policy implementation within the EU Member States remains uneven. According to a report presented in 2014 by EU Kids Online9, a multinational research network funded by the EC Better Internet for Kids programme, a dividing line still exists between parts of Europe that enjoy better support and those that receive somewhat less public support for internet safety. The study highlighted significant differences in the state of the implementation of the BIK goals, with countries such as Sweden, Netherlands and the UK standing out for reaching the highest level of public policy development and initiatives undertaken at the national level to promote internet safety. By contrast, some Southern and Eastern European countries (Slovenia, Estonia, Lithuania, France and Italy) are at the lower end of public policy development and implementation.

a. Insafe

Created under the framework of the Safer Internet Programme, Insafe is a European network, comprised of 31 national awareness centres (known as Safer Internet Centres). Every national Centre implements awareness and educational campaigns, runs a helpline and a hotline, and works closely with youth and relevant actors to ensure an effective and multi-stakeholder approach to create a better internet. The mission of the Insafe network is to empower children and young people to use the internet, as well as other online and mobile technologies, positively, safely and effectively. The network aims at informing and educating youths, families and schools for a responsible use of the internet, while at the same time raising awareness among public institutions, media and private stakeholders on the rights and needs of children and youths.

Insafe partners work together to share resources and best practices and monitor emerging trends, while seeking to reinforce the image of the web as a place to learn. They endeavor to raise awareness about reporting harmful or illegal content and services.

Each centre sets up:

- A national helpline to respond to the questions and concerns of young people linked to their experiences online or the harmful or illegal online content they encounter.
- A hotline whose aim is to allow members of the public to report illegal content on the internet. The hotlines then deal with the reports by passing them on to the appropriate body (internet service providers and law enforcement agencies) in accordance with their operating rules. This helps to reduce the flow of illegal content and contributes to the effective protection of internet users. Hotlines are coordinated by INHOPE funded by the Safer Internet Programme.

b. International Association of Internet Hotlines (INHOPE)

INHOPE was formed in 1999 as a group of Internet hotline providers in Europe. Today, it includes members from 45 countries around the world who gathered around the aim to use their expertise to eradicate child abuse material from the internet. During 2013, INHOPE members received a total of 1.2 million reports, a 14% increase on the previous year10.

The association relies on a Hotline Analysts team to collect and analyze child abuse material, assist internet service providers (ISPs) in taking it down, ensure the prevention of further distribution and protect children from further victimization. The material gathered is then encompassed into a collective database known as the INHOPE Report Management System. The system stores details of online child abuse material, which is then used by the association members to tackle websites hosted in their own country and alert other hotlines of content in foreign websites. At the same time, INHOPE works in close cooperation with law enforcement agencies, NGOs and private sector companies across Europe to

develop common strategies to prevent and remove online child abuse material. Its partners include Europol, INTERPOL, ECPAT and the European Financial Coalition.

INHOPE also works to sensitize the general public on online child abuse issues, offering everyone within its member countries the possibility to report child abuse material found online. In 2010 the association created the INHOPE Foundation, a charity aiming to help develop new hotlines worldwide, particularly in emerging countries where there is a lack of funding or legislation against child sexual abuse.

ii. **Global Alliance against Child Sexual Abuse Online**

The Global Alliance against Child Sexual Abuse Online was created in 2012 to unite efforts around the world to more effectively combat online sexual crimes against children. Based on a joint initiative by the EU and the USA, it gathers 54 countries from around the world, which commit to pursue concrete actions to enhance victim protection, identify and prosecute offenders, raise awareness and reduce the availability of child pornography online and the re-victimization of children. The Alliance gathers Ministers of the Interior and Justice from the member States, with an aim to increase the number of rescued victims, develop more effective prosecution strategies, and reduce the amount of child sexual abuse images available online. The four key policy targets that the participants committed to (enhancing efforts to identify and assist victims, investigate cases of child sexual abuse and prosecute offenders, increase public awareness of the risks posed by children's activity online, and reduce the availability of child pornography) correspond to an equal number of operational goals to be achieved on an international level, namely:

- Increase the number of identified victims in the INTERPOL International Child Abuse Image Database\(^{11}\) by at least 10% yearly;
- Establish the necessary framework for the criminalization of child sexual abuse online and the effective prosecution of offenders;
- Develop appropriate public awareness campaigns or other measures which educate parents, children, and the general public on these risks and the steps they can take to minimize them;
- Encourage participation by the private sector in identifying and removing known child abuse material located in the relevant State. Moreover, the Alliance aims to increase the speed of notice and takedown procedures in the member States.\(^{12}\)

Every second year starting from 2014, each participant to the Alliance will have to submit a report describing the state of implementation of the measures announced, assess progress made to reach the

\(^{11}\) Created in 2001, the ICAID provides the means for national law enforcement agencies to share criminal intelligence relating to the production and distribution of online child abuse material. The database contains hundreds of thousands of images of child sexual abuse submitted by local police authorities in INTERPOL 186 member countries. The images are used by INTERPOL’s experts to compare details and connect images from the same series of abuse, in order to identify victims and their location. INTERPOL also operates a secure online network to share the material with police investigators in 35 countries, thus benefiting from each other’s expertise when analysing the images.

final objectives, and indicate specific actions that it will be undertaking as a follow-up. The reports will subsequently be discussed at a collective conference to review the progress made, exchange best practices and agree on new goals and targets to pursue.

iii. European Financial Coalition against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Online

The European Financial Coalition is an initiative co-funded by the European Commission that brings together key actors from law enforcement, the private sector and civil society in Europe with the common goal of fighting the commercial sexual exploitation of children online. Its origin dates back to 2006, when the US National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the International Center for Missing and Exploited Children created the first Financial Coalition against Child Pornography, bringing together States from all over the world to eradicate child pornography from the internet. The Coalition focused its action on the commercial aspect of CSAO, monitoring the flow of funds related to child pornography and closing down the accounts used to buy and sell such material. Given the need of a common European strategy in regards to this issue, European members of the Coalition founded the EFC in 2009, in order to develop a common response to combat sexual exploitation of children.

The EFC reunites leading banks, credit card corporations, third-party payment companies, and Internet services providers. These stakeholders cooperate with legal enforcement agencies and NGOs, focusing on the distribution of illegal content where any kind of commercial relation is established between two or more parties in an online environment. They take action against the payment and ICT systems that are used to run illegal operations related to child sexual abuse.

The EU has funded this project for a 36 month time, in the hope that it will lead to the establishment of a permanent platform and resource center for law enforcement authorities, payment system providers and ISPs.

iv. European Cybercrime Center (EC3)

The European Cybercrime Center (EC3) was established by Europol to be the focal point in the EU’s fight against cybercrime and to support Member States and the Union’s institutions in building capacity for investigations and cooperation with international partners. The center’s mandate focuses on areas of cybercrime which cause serious harm to the victim, such as online child sexual abuse. In regards to this area (referred to as “Focal Point Twins”), EC3 works to identify perpetrators and establish cooperation strategies among the participating Member States. It further analyses cross-border criminal networks and their methods of communication, with a view to dismantling those networks.

It also operates to facilitate the identification of the victims, stop ongoing exploitation and initiate care measures by competent authorities. Focal Point Twins cooperates on an operational level via the Europol Liaison Officers’ (ELO) network, provides strategic and operational analytical support to national agencies, and supports international projects such as the European Financial Coalition.13

13 European Cybercrime Center, www.europol.europa.eu/ec3old
3. Legislation, policy and practice in Cyprus

I. Legal framework against child sexual abuse online

Online technologies have been on the rise in Cyprus over the last decade. Nowadays, most Cypriot children access the internet every day and have a social networking profile; however, they still seem to rank low on digital literacy and safety skills compared to other European countries. According to a study by EU Kids Online, most of them lack capacities as regards basic digital skills such as changing filter preferences, comparing websites to decide if content is true, and finding information on how to use the internet safely. Moreover, many of them get in contact on the internet with people they have never met offline (33% of Cypriot children had contact with a person they met only online when playing videogames), and a minority meets them face to face, mostly (82%) with their parents being unaware.

What is more worrying, according to police reports child pornography cases in Cyprus are on the rise. In the first semester of 2014, police investigated 35 cases regarding child pornography, compared to 23 cases in 2013. This number is expected to increase by the end of the year.

The Republic of Cyprus has signed, ratified and essentially incorporated into the Republic’s municipal law all international treaties and Conventions concerning child protection, including:

− Convention on Cybercrime of Budapest (Law No.22 (III) of 2004)
− (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (Law No.243 of 1990)
− The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction (Law No.11(III) of 1994)
− Lanzarote Convention, ratified on November 13th 2014.

In addition to this, Cyprus has adopted a number of laws aiming at combating child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and trafficking. The two main pieces of legislation governing these areas are the Combating of Trafficking and Exploitation of Persons and the Protection of Victims Law of 2007 (Law No.83(I)/2007) which replaced the Combating of Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Exploitation of Children Law of 2000 (3(I)/2000) and the Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography Act of 2014.

• The Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography Act of 2014 (N. 91(I)/2014)15

This newly established law implements European Directive 2011/93 / EU into national law, while also including provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse of 2007 (Lanzarote Convention). Its aim is to focus on child protection rather than criminal punishment, providing assistance to minors from the moment a sexual abuse claim is alleged or reported to authorities.

15 Ο περί της Πρόληψης και της Καταπολέμησης της Σεξουαλικής Κακοποίησης, της Σεξουαλικής Εκμετάλλευσης Παιδιών και της Παιδικής Πορνογραφίας Νόμος του 2014 (Ν.91(I)/2014), Full text and Summary, available at www.cylaw.org/nomoi/indexes/2014_1_91.html
The text defines a “sexual act” as “any act which by its nature is sexual or may be construed as sexual” (an extremely broad definition that can include any act related to the sexual sphere). Stricter sentences are introduced for offences of a sexual nature against children, including life imprisonment when the victim is younger than 13. Special emphasis is placed on offences committed through the abuse of trust, influence or close relationship with the child, which are recognized as aggravating circumstance.

It is also notable that the law criminalizes a parent, relative, or professional’s failure to report a known case of sexual abuse on a child. Moreover, failure to terminate a teacher, lawyer, social worker or health professional that has sexually abused a child constitutes an aggravating circumstance. Another important element in the law is the introduction of the offense of solicitation of children via the internet (online grooming), when online contact is followed by a meeting with the child having no other purpose but the commission of a sexual act. The crime is punishable by a maximum penalty of 10 years, the same applicable to individuals trying to recruit children for online child pornography.

The statute explicitly excludes that ignorance of the victim’s age or consent constitutes a justification, except in the case of consensual sexual acts between minors or between a minor and an adult where the age difference does not exceed 3 years. This exception only applies to the commission of sexual acts, grooming, and the production, possession or access to child pornography. It is not applicable if one of the two children is under the age of 13 years.

Art.14 provides for a number of additional penalties for persons convicted of these crimes, including exclusion from public benefits, prohibition or termination of employment, and confiscation of property. Rules are set for the creation of a supervisory authority with the task of monitoring those convicted of sexual offences against a child, both through electronic monitoring and through the recording and storing of data (including DNA samples) concerning the offenders. In addition to this, employers who work in structures which involve children should ask job candidates for a criminal record and should not hire anyone without such certificate.

In regards to criminal proceedings, new provisions are introduced to ensure that they are carried out without causing additional trauma to the victim. Children are now allowed to choose who should accompany them to interviews, and to have access to free legal aid (including legal representation in court by the Commissioner for Children’s Rights). Personnel dealing with the child should be adequately trained and victims should be informed (in a language they understand) and protected during every stage of the trial. They should be granted fast, child-friendly interviews and be allowed to testify without being present in court, through the use of video recordings which are to be considered sufficient evidence by the court as there is no require for corroborating evidence. However, the possibility for the child to be cross examined and visited by a psychologist is provided for.

An important role is played by psychologists and police officers, who should be trained and experienced in matters related to child abuse. Measures are also introduced for the allocation of a compensation fund for victims and the introduction of a special assistance and support procedure (regardless of the victim’s willingness to cooperate with justice).

These include rehabilitation programmes for victims and perpetrators, special training of personnel who could come in contact with child victims, and prevention measures to be coordinated by the Ministry of Education.
II. National policy and practice

Public authorities and private stakeholders in Cyprus have taken action against new digital threats against children. Commissioner for Children's Rights Ms. Leda Koursoumba recently stressed the need to tackle online sexual abuse and exploitation of minors, and she has already made recommendations to the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee asking for stricter legislative measures and education programmes to address these issues.16

In the last decade the government has implemented several measures to develop an effective and comprehensive strategy against sexual exploitation of children online. Most of them are taken in the framework of comprehensive European programmes (e.g. Better Internet for Kids and the One in Five Campaign) and require the cooperation of relevant stakeholders such as government agencies, public institutions, and the Police.

i. Cyber Crime Unit

The Cyprus Police have set up the Cyber Crime Unit, which is responsible for investigating all cyber related crimes including child sexual abuse. The Cyber Crime Unit works in close cooperation with other international and European law enforcement agencies and ensures adequate training to all members of the unit; some of the members of the Unit are trainers for other international and European police agencies themselves.

Besides setting up this specialized unit, the Cyprus Police have improved, developed and supported procedures to identify victims through the International Child Sexual Exploitation Database managed by Interpol. The Police cooperate with different law enforcement agencies across the world and contribute to INTERPOL and Europol’s victim identification efforts, by participating to the ICSE database and to EC3. Officers and investigators work in close cooperation with civil society organizations, such as CyberEthics.

At a national level, awareness campaigns and training programmes for the judiciary have been launched concerning child sexual abuse crimes and the current trends of such crimes. Special importance has been placed on developing media campaigns and published material in order to inform teachers, families, children, and the general public about the risks posed online. Furthermore, Cyber Crime Unit officers regularly visit schools to inform the students about the dangers posed by the internet and how to make safe use of it.

Following the entering into force of Law 91(1)/2014, an additional group of police officers have received advanced training on investigating child sexual abuse cases. The training had an interdisciplinary nature and included contributions from psychologists, criminologists, lawyers, medical examiners and cybercrime experts. Courses on the new law for investigators and interviewers have also been made available in the past months.

ii. **CyberEthics**

The CyberEthics project (the Cyprus Safer Internet Center), active in Cyprus since 2006, promotes the safer use of the Internet in Cyprus, and serves the needs of all people that live on the island (i.e. also Turkish-Cypriots and other minorities) addressing not only issues of child pornography, but also racism, gender discrimination and inappropriate use of peoples’ images. It operates as a combined Awareness Node, Helpline and Hotline. The project is co-funded by the Safer Internet plus Programme of the European Commission, and coordinated by the Cyprus Neuroscience and Technology Institute (CNTI) and the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute of the Ministry of Education.

The structure includes an Awareness Raising Centre, a helpline providing information to callers about harmful conduct online, and a hotline (SafenetCY) to report illegal content found on the web. The hotline covers cases of child sexual abuse material, child grooming activities, child trafficking, child sex tourism, but also racism, gender discrimination and inappropriate use of peoples’ images. It also provides for the possibility to make anonymous reports.

iii. **ONE in FIVE Campaign**

The ONE in FIVE Campaign was launched in 2010 by the Council of Europe Programme “Building a Europe for and with Children”, which implemented it in all Member States through different national agencies and NGOs. The overall objective of the campaign is to increase the level of commitment and action needed to stop sexual violence against children, by encouraging States to sign and ratify the Lanzarote Convention and by raising awareness of the full extent of sexual violence against children in Europe. The campaign addressed individuals, schools, civil society organizations, public institutions and governments, and aims at equipping them with the necessary knowledge to recognize and report sexual abuse cases.

In Cyprus, the campaign was implemented initially since 2011 by "Hope For Children" UNCRC Policy Centre and since 2013 by a Steering Group comprised of “Hope For Children” UNCRC Policy Center, Ms Stella Kyriakides (General Rapporteur on Children of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe), the University of Cyprus, Office of the Commissioner for Children’s Rights, Nicosia Municipality, Cyprus National Commission for UNESCO, and the Independent Advisory Committee for the Prevention of Violence in the Family. In particular, Hope For Children was active in promoting its messages through the media and the internet: besides publishing articles on the prevention of sexual violence against children on local newspapers, the organization also managed to launch a petition to ratify the Lanzarote Convention, which eventually resulted in the incorporation of the treaty into national law in November 2014. It also created a website and a Facebook group devoted to the theme of sexual violence against children, and ran a street awareness campaign. It took the responsibility to translate and distribute the campaign materials, including the book, website, posters, and video clip of the “Underwear Rule”, a story teaching children to refuse inappropriate touch. Lectures and seminars for parents, teachers, children and child carers were organized across the country.

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18 Ibid
4. Online child abuse offences: an overview

I. Online child pornography (Child sexual abuse material)

The definition of child sexual abuse material (CAM) includes text, pictures, sounds or videos of a child engaged in sexual activities, images of sexual parts of a child or sexual images of a person looking like a child. In the past years ECPAT and other NGOs have been advocating to stop referring to this material as “child pornography”, not only because the term “child abuse material” is broader but also because referring to it as “pornography” gives the impression that the child agreed to participate in the abuses shown.

Data recently supplied by Interpol and the UK Government suggest that the CAM industry is now abusing tens of thousands children around the world, to produce around one million sexual abuse images that are commercialized and exchanged on the world wide web\(^19\). According to the findings of Europol and the European Financial Coalition\(^20\), the development of new platforms for non-commercial distribution has resulted in a very small amount of CAM (around 10%) being now paid for. Peer to peer technology, live streaming, and instant messaging have made it increasingly easier to purchase indecent material for free, to the point that paying by credit card to download from websites is now seen largely as an option for the inexperienced, not least because credit card payments can easily be tracked by the police and are often accompanied by compromise of the owner’s details by organized crime groups. Instead, law enforcement has observed that an ever increasing demand has made new material to be a currency in itself. Since the value of the image is placed in its novelty, this tendency results in ongoing abuse of new victims that are even harder to identify as there is very little material depicting them.

Another obstacle in the fight against child abuse is CAM distribution in closed groups on social media. Despite the growth of more recent social services, bulletin boards (BBS), newsgroups and internet relay chats (IRC) remain in use. It is thought that some offenders may see greater security in continuing to use a trusted platform and view newer untested services with suspicion. BBS, social media and closed forums serve as meeting points which facilitate a move to one-to-one communication and distribution, and to advertise links to content stored on hosting sites or in encrypted online storage facilities.\(^21\)

On the other hand, commercial distribution is still far from being completely eradicated, and there are indications that it is evolving in response to technological developments and to meet the demand for new material. It also appears that some non-commercial distributors are starting to adopt a more entrepreneurial approach, charging fees to have access to new and previously unseen material. While some specialists have seen no new cases of commercial CAM distribution for some time, successful international law enforcement cooperation and information exchange can mean that a single investigation in one country can identify numerous subscribers in another. From a law enforcement perspective, the best way to combat the online exchange of CAM is effective communication and coordination between national police agencies and fast procedures to block and take down illegal websites. Government support is also paramount to ensure efficient action.

\(^{19}\) Carr J., The Internet dimension of sexual violence against children, from Protecting children from sexual violence – A comprehensive approach, Council of Europe, 2010, pag.278
\(^{20}\) Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Online - A Strategic Assessment, European Financial Coalition against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Online, Brussels, 2013, pag.7-9
\(^{21}\) Ibid
A good example in this regard is the intervention by the Russian Government against organized crime activities which resulted in the shutdown of a major CAM host in 2007. A total of 247 child pornography websites on Runet, a Russian Internet domain, were shut down, resulting in an 80% drop in online child abuse cases in the country\textsuperscript{22}. Amendments to current legislation were also made, toughening punishments for child pornography crimes. There are other similar examples of State intervention leading to the speedy shut down of hosts of illegal websites. It must be acknowledged that very often the necessary political will is lacking, not to mention that resources are simply not made available.

II. Online grooming

The recent increase in child internet access has resulted in major changes in the production, distribution and consumption of child abuse material, which is no longer restricted to imagery but increasingly related to direct online interactions with child victims. Online grooming is one of the most widespread phenomena related to this issue.

Online grooming is defined as the process by which a person befriends a young person online to facilitate online sexual contact and/or a physical meeting with them, with the goal of committing sexual abuse\textsuperscript{23}. Although some groomers may just seek to engage with young people in a sexual way and collect pornographic images, many times online contact results in a physical meeting between the offender and the child who is often brought to a private location and sexually abused. For example, in a major grooming case in Sweden, known as the “Alexandra case”\textsuperscript{24}, a man disguised as a young woman used the internet to contact more than a hundred girls and convince them to send nude pictures of themselves. After gaining a relationship of trust with the victims, he further lured them into meeting in person, making them believe they would meet with wealthy, young men willing to pay them for a “date”. During the meetings, the girls were asked to have sex with the groomer and most of them agreed to do so for fear of losing “Alexandra”’s trust.

The EU-funded European Online Grooming Project\textsuperscript{25} is the major study ever conducted on online grooming. It sheds light on the characteristics and extent of this phenomenon across Europe, analyzing the behaviour of offenders and victims of grooming as well as the role of ICTs in facilitating grooming.

The research\textsuperscript{26} shows that groomers are not a homogenous group in terms of their demographic and offending characteristics. For most of them, the offence of online grooming tended to be the first conviction.

Moreover, their capacity to develop sophisticated computing skills was not limited by initial lack of knowledge of ICTs, and was achieved either by training at the workplace or by covert observation of family members’ online behaviour. The map of sites and chat-rooms accessed by participants included

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\textsuperscript{22} Coccaro R. and others, \textit{Child Abuse Images and Sexual Exploitation of Children Online}, ECPAT International, Bangkok, 2009, pag.28


\textsuperscript{25} European Online Grooming Project, \texttt{www.europeanonlinegroomingproject.com}

\textsuperscript{26} Webster S., Davidson J., Bifulco A. and others, \textit{European Online Grooming Project – Final Report}, European Commission Safer Internet Plus Programme, Brussels, 2012, pag.6-10
social networks, chat rooms, online dating platforms, sexual abuse sites, online gaming platforms and voice calls applications such as Skype. Mobile phones were also used at an advanced stage of the grooming process, as a more direct and immediate way to contact the youth.

The length of the process was described as variable depending on the victim’s behaviour and reaction: it could take from minutes to months, resulting either in a loss of contact or in a physical meeting with the young person. The amount of time needed also changed according to the groomer’s behavioral pattern. In this regard, the study identified three main typologies of offenders:

- **The intimacy seeker**: these men tended to seek long-lasting, intimate relationships with the young person whom they saw as “consenting partners”. They did not change their online identity and spent a significant amount of time talking and getting to know the child before asking for a meeting. Also, most of them had never been convicted for an offence related to child abuse and tended to show a “less sexualized” behaviour.
- **The adaptable**: these individuals tended to adapt their grooming style according to the initial reaction of the young person. Most of them had previous convictions for child sexual offending and possessed a collection of child abuse material. They had a distorted perception of young persons’ behaviour and tended to see them as sexually mature, although they did not approach them with the purpose of developing a romantic relationship. Another typical feature was the adoption of risk management strategies such as creating different online identities, or using a computer or phone exclusively for grooming purposes.
- **The hyper-sexualized**: these offenders tended to adopt a very fast, highly sexualized grooming approach that escalated into a sexual conversation within a few minutes. They created different online identities, often choosing a sexual name or an indecent profile picture (e.g. pictures of their genitals), and the majority of them limited their contact with young people to the online world. They tend to see children as de-humanized sexual objects and many of them also had previous convictions for child sexual abuse.

A feature common to all three types of groomers was the tendency to contact several young people at the same time, thus increasing the chances to find suitable victims. Children who are more likely to fall victim of these men usually come from difficult backgrounds and experience psychosocial issues such as low self-esteem, depression, loneliness or concurrent sexual abuse. Groomers take advantage of this by adopting a benign, friendly approach to gain the young person’s trust and discourage him/her from disclosing the relationship to others (parents or caretakers). Initial tactics also include buying gifts, topping up mobile phones, and offering cash. On the other hand, some children may adopt a very explicit approach by actively seeking sexual contact with adults online, sometimes even selling sex or nude images. They may do so out of desire to take risks, explore their sexuality, or re-enact their earlier sexual abuse experiences with adults. What is common to all these categories is that they eventually become manipulated into falling victim to online and offline sexual abuse.

The further the relationship goes, the harder it becomes for the child to interrupt it and seek for help. Many of them are completely oblivious to the abuse scenario they are being entrapped in until they try to disassociate from the offender. In these cases, abusers usually resort to threat and blackmail to prevent the victim from distancing. Emotional blackmail for example is a common strategy to discourage disclosure, especially at later stages of the relationship when the child is emotionally dependant and

27 Ibid, pag.13-14
28 Ibid, pag.15
The impact of internet and new media on the occurrence of violence against children in Europe and in Cyprus

Rossella Sala, January 2015
“Hope For Children” UNCRC Policy Center

easily manipulated by the abuser. Depending on whether or not the young person has already started behaving sexually, the offender could also threaten him to hack into his computer, steal his passwords, or distribute nude pictures of him over the internet. Moreover, the child’s agreement to engage in sexual conduct can be used by the offender as a sign of complicity in the abuse, and increases the chances of the victim being stigmatized and re-victimized by society. This is regardless of the fact that his or her compliance is due to naïve and limited understanding of ICT-related threats.

It is undoubted that online grooming has long-term harmful consequences on children’s psychological and sexual well-being. In recent years, much has been done at a public policy and law enforcement level to tackle this phenomenon and educate the public on how to prevent and recognize it.

In November 2011 the European Union introduced a new directive aimed at introducing legislation to address the sexual exploitation of children. Directive 2011/93 is the first European binding document to explicitly criminalize the conduct of an adult who, by means of ICTs, proposes to meet a child under the age of consent for the purpose of committing a sexual offence. However the law still requires that the proposal be followed by material acts leading to a meeting in order to be punishable. The act, or the attempt, to convince a child to produce sexual images of him/herself is also criminalized. The time limitation for transposing the Directive expired in December 2013, and most States (including Cyprus) have succeeded in implementing national laws against grooming and child pornography. So far however, these laws have resulted in very few criminal convictions, probably partly because of the reluctance of police units to enforce them but also because of the obvious difficulties in prosecuting a crime almost entirely based on the perpetrator’s mental element.

Besides improving national legislation, European States have created awareness campaigns and tools to inform the public on risks posed by groomers, promote safe behaviour online, and increase children’s resilience. Safer Internet Centers have been established in all EU countries and most schools include ICTs safety in their curricula. However, the European Online Grooming research has highlighted that significant gaps still exist in adults and children’s understanding of the phenomenon: to begin with, young people continue to be partially unaware of the benefits of private profile pages on SNS, and to underestimate the risks posed by inadequate privacy settings. Moreover, the possibility to collect personal information by scanning the online environment goes widely unperceived, as well as the risk of becoming victim of abuse simply by sending sexual images without meeting the perpetrator. There is also very little awareness on threats coming from peers: most teenagers have a stereotypical perception of groomers as “old, fat men”, a picture that fails to portray the diverse typologies of online sex offenders. New ICTs such as smart phones and apps (Snapchat, Tinder) also pose new risks that children do not take into consideration.

Another worrying finding is the lack of technological awareness of parents, teachers and caretakers. Given their key role in providing reliable, balanced information about online risks and in serving as a source of help for victims of abuse, they need to be appropriately trained and informed on online behaviour and threats.

30 Ibid, pag.21
III. Online recruitment for child trafficking

Human trafficking represents one of the most serious and widespread forms of child sexual exploitation. It is deemed to be the second largest criminal industry in the world after arms dealing, and it has been addressed by several different international treaties and conventions. The U.N. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons defines human trafficking as “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”.

When the victim is a child, these conducts should be punishable as trafficking even if they do not involve any of the means mentioned in the article. This definition was later taken up by EU Directive 2011/36, which also provides for irrelevance of the victim’s consent when means of coercion, fraud or abduction have been used against him or her. The Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography definition of sale of children includes any act or transaction whereby a child is transferred by a person to another against payment or other form of remuneration, for the purpose of sexual exploitation (including prostitution), transfer of organs, engagement in forced labour, or illegal adoption.

All three documents set provisions for the assistance and protection of victims, with a special emphasis on child victims. States parties are required to adopt internal measures to ensure legal proceedings are victim-friendly and are carried out respecting the trafficked person’s privacy and need to avoid further victimization. States should ensure the early identification of victims, provide them with legal counseling, medical care and psychological assistance, give them appropriate protection (e.g. through witnesses protection programmes), and support their physical and social recovery. Needs of child victims should be taken into special consideration and they should receive appropriate support according to their age and personal situation (e.g. they should be appointed a guardian if no other parent or caretaker is available). The child’s best interests shall be a primary consideration in the application of all measures. It is important to stress that victims of trafficking and their families should be allowed to remain in the territory of the State, temporarily or permanently, if circumstances so require.

Although the influence of new information technologies on child trafficking is not extensively documented, it is known that criminals increasingly use ICTs to recruit victims, offer their “services” to the public and communicate with their network. Trafficking in persons requires extensive coordination throughout the process of planning, recruiting victims, transporting and transferring them at various times and locations; criminals are therefore led to use ICTs to facilitate their operations. It is not known whether the use of new technologies has increased trafficking in children, but it is believed that it has made criminal activities easier to perform. Recent technological advances have made it increasingly necessary for young people to use the internet both in education and private life, and this, coupled with the falling prices of IT services and technology, has resulted in a growing number of children and

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31 UNHCR, www.unhcr.org/4cb315c96.html
32 U.N. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons defines human trafficking, Art.3
33 Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA, Art.2
34 Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, Art.2 and 3
35 U.N. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons defines human trafficking, Art.6, 7, 9 and 10; Directive 2011/36/EU Art.8-16; Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, Art.6-10
adolescents accessing the internet on a regular basis. People seeking to recruit children for trafficking are therefore able to lure them on websites or other internet services (chat rooms, advertisements, marriage agencies, dating and job offering sites). Technology can also be used for the purpose of exploitation, particularly sexual – either by individuals for their own private use or by organized criminal groups or other entities using the Internet as a commercial tool to generate profit by selling images or services.

Technology can be a powerful tool both for perpetrating and fighting human trafficking. ICTs play a key role in the fight against transnational organized crime, especially when effective cooperation measures between police agencies are put in place. Coordination is paramount to successfully investigate, interrupt and prosecute traffickers, particularly in light of the current acceleration of globalized technology. The international mobility of offenders creates the need for law enforcers and judicial authorities to develop networks and tools aimed at identifying contact offices in other jurisdictions, so as to ensure effective cooperation in the extradition of persons, transfer of convicted criminals, and mutual legal assistance. Several examples of good practice in cooperation measures have already been developed on a global basis, particularly by Interpol. To help the global law enforcement community share intelligence and coordinate action, the Agency has created technical tools such as a Notices and Diffusions system to track criminals and locate missing persons, and a Human Smuggling and Trafficking (HST) message which provides a standardized format for reporting cases of trafficking between member countries and to INTERPOL’s database37.

The protection of child victims and witnesses is also a core issue in the fight against human trafficking. Technology can provide a significant help in tracking and protecting the identity of individuals under special protection. Measures can range from simple low-cost procedures (such as giving witnesses a mobile phone with some credit and relevant emergency telephone numbers) to highly complicated resource-intensive measures (such as domestic or foreign relocation of witnesses or identity change).38

IV. Sexting

Sexting has been defined as ‘the exchange of sexual messages or images’ and ‘the creating, sharing and forwarding of sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images’ through mobile phones, internet and other ICTs39. Quantitative research conducted in the framework of the EU Kids Online study has found that 15% to 40% of young Europeans engage in sexting on a regular basis, a figure that keeps growing year by year. In the majority of countries, children who experience risky offline activities (e.g. drinking, early sexual behaviour, violence in the family) are more likely to send and receive sexual messages; sexting also seems to be more common among older teens and teens with high levels of sensation seeking40.

Incidence rates for girls and boys vary significantly across Europe. Generally speaking, conservative countries (Cyprus, Italy) have a higher number of males engaging in sexting, while in more progressive states (Nordic countries, Netherlands, Czech Republic) girls are equally or more likely to send “sexts” than their male counterparts. Legal implications of sexting are becoming increasingly serious as the phenomenon is now being exploited by individuals with a sexual interest in children, employing “sextortion” techniques to ensure continued compliance in the creation and sharing of indecent material. “Sextortion” is the popular term for the process by which young people are coerced into continuing to produce indecent material by the threat of exposure, a threat which is often put into practice causing even further trauma to the victim. Sexting usually starts as a voluntary activity, with children and young people creating and sharing sexual material for romantic purposes, to seek attention from their peers or even to sell it in exchange for money or other gifts. However, this behaviour is likely to expose them to threats and blackmail by peers or adults, who can easily force victims to produce more sexual pictures or engage in sexual activity on webcam or web stream. A commercial market for this material already exists, and it will probably keep expanding in the future. In particular, it has been suggested that young men engaged in the domestic trafficking of young girls for sexual exploitation (also known as “lover boys”) may see the production and commercial distribution of self-generated material as a potentially lucrative business opportunity.

The striking feature of this phenomenon is the prevalence of threats caused by peers rather than adults. Sexual pressure, especially by boys on girls, has been boosted by technology to the point that it is often perceived as a normal behaviour. For example, interviews with high school students in the UK have shown that technologically mediated harassment of girls is so common that victims tend to resign themselves to it, developing very advanced resilience skills to cope with constant requests for indecent material and sexual acts. There are clear signals that it is time to shift the focus from threats posed by adults towards reducing risk from known peers. By being oppressive, coercive and based on the culture of silence, sexting is very similar to cyberbullying and may need to be addressed with similar strategies.

Although some countries, such as Australia and the USA, have developed a very strict legal framework for the prosecution of young people engaging in sexting, several experts recommend States avoid penalizing children and teenagers with the same punishment an adult would face. Instead, sexualized adolescent behaviour should be dealt with from a child protection perspective, discussed as an issue of discipline and education about what is socially and morally acceptable, not as a criminal justice matter. This is especially important as sexting is strongly related to young people’s conception of gender roles and the female body. Ringrose’s research shows that this kind of sexual harassment is shaped by the gender dynamics of peer groups in which, primarily, boys harass girls, and it is exacerbated by the

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41 Ibid
42 European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) – Europol, Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Online - A Strategic Assessment, European Financial Coalition against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Online, Brussels, 2013, pag.10-11
43 Ibid
45 Ibid, pag.54
46 Coccaro R. and others, Child Abuse Images and Sexual Exploitation of Children Online, ECPAT International, Bangkok, 2009, pag.33-34
gendered norms of popular culture, family and school that fail to recognize the problem or to support girls. This creates gender specific risks where girls are unable to openly speak about sexual activities and practices, while boys are at risk of peer exclusion if they do not brag about sexual experiences. It is important that safety initiatives provide gender sensitive support for girls without treating sexting as a girl-only or girl-initiated problem; the role, responsibility and experiences of boys in relation to sexting also deserve more research and practical attention.

Teachers, parents and adults dealing with adolescents need to develop an open and dialogic approach to young people’s sexual desire and behaviour. Overcoming taboos and embarrassment related to the sexual sphere is necessary if we want to recognize and address the sexual pressures children face in nowadays.

V. Webcam child sex tourism

Child sex tourism is a well-known plague affecting tens of thousands of children around the world, especially in South-East Asia. The Philippines has long been a regular target of foreign adults seeking sex with children and is regarded as one of the typical child sex tourism destinations; estimates of child sexual exploitation vary from there being 100,000 child victims of prostitution in the country as a whole, to the nearly 20,000 child victims of prostitution in the Manila area alone. The Philippines have become the focus of media and child rights activists and arrests of foreign tourists for sexual crimes against children take place frequently. In recent years, however, traditional forms of child sexual exploitation seem to have been gradually replaced by a new phenomenon based on exploitation through the internet. In the early 2010s, international NGOs such as ECPAT and Terre des Hommes started receiving alarming signals that new commercial child exploitation trades were evolving and spreading parallel to rising global Internet access rates and developments in communications technology. This tendency remained formally undiscovered until 2011, when a group of Swedish and Filipino nationals was prosecuted and convicted for forcing children to perform sexual acts on webcam live streaming, which were broadcasted to sexual abusers living abroad.

Webcam child sex tourism (WCST), as this phenomenon is called, is defined as the act of adults offering payment or other rewards to view and direct live streaming video footage of children in another country performing sexual acts. It is a combination of the concepts of child pornography and child prostitution, with the peculiarity that it exclusively takes place on the internet (although in some cases online contact has led to physical meetings and abuse of children in developing countries). This business is growing together with internet access rates in South Asia, and involves individual, family-run and middlemen-run structures (the so-called “cybersex dens”). Children who get involved in WCST do so out of a personal decision, out of parent coercion, or because they are forced by a third party, namely middlemen and

48 Combating Child Sex Tourism: Q&A, ECPAT International, Bangkok, 2008, pag.10
49 Ibid
50 Fullscreen on View - An Exploratory Study on the Background and Psychosocial Consequences of Webcam Child Sex Tourism in the Philippines, Terre des Hommes The Netherlands, The Hague, 2013
51 Ibid, pag.5
52 Webcam Child Sex Tourism - Becoming Sweetie: a novel approach to stopping the global rise of Webcam Child Sex Tourism, Terre des Hommes The Netherlands, The Hague, 2013, pag.11
human traffickers who lure young people offering them money or jobs and then force them into prostitution.

Victims are usually aged between 7 and 17 and coming from disadvantaged areas or destitute families\(^{53}\). The lack of a permanent source of livelihood and pressing social problems often lead parents and families to exploit children in WCST, in the belief that a “hands-off” crime perpetrated over the internet is less harmful than street prostitution. Negative effects on victims are therefore neglected or put aside by adults, who see online exploitation as an easy and relatively harmless way to make money. This is a very misleading idea that does not take into account the devastating consequences of sexual abuse on children; what is worse, the involvement of parents and middlemen in the process physically harms children and causes them to lose trust in adults. Studies carried out on WCST victims have shown that they present all traumagenic dynamics of child sexual abuse as described by Finkelhor and Brown\(^{54}\): traumatic sexualization and hyper-sexualization, feeling of betrayal and mistrust towards adults, powerlessness and victimization. They tend to fall behind in education, drop out of school, show anxiety, depression and self-destructive behaviour twice as often as children who do not experience online abuse\(^{55}\). What makes it worse is that, they are further marginalized and regarded with suspicion by society. Filipino culture is strongly based on values such as family, religion, and honour; therefore personal sacrifice for the sake of the family is seen as a moral duty, especially when it is a means to support younger siblings. This discourages exploited children from reporting abuse perpetrated by their parents, in fear that they could lose them and be blamed by the community as “betrayers”\(^{56}\).

Despite the substantial lack of reliable statistics about WCST, we can form an idea of the extent of the phenomenon by examining data gathered by local NGOs. The number of victims of this phenomenon has been estimated in tens of thousands in the Philippines alone\(^{57}\), and it is growing as rural areas gain access to information technologies. As a consequence of the recent measures taken by the Philippine government to eradicate child exploitation, offenders have also started moving their business to other South Asian countries, such as Thailand and Vietnam.

Thanks to international legal instruments such as the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children and the UN Protocol against Trafficking in Persons, WCST is illegal in most countries in the world. Nevertheless, very few cases are reported to authorities and even fewer result in the conviction of the offender. This seems to contradict official figures gathered by the FBI and Terre des Hommes Netherlands, which show that 950,000 sexual predators are online at any given moment and several thousands of them try to contact children for WCST every day\(^{58}\). This is partly because child victims do not often report the abuse to the police, and law enforcements rely on an outdated model of reactive investigation which fails to functions whenever victims choose not to report crimes. For several social and cultural reasons, children

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\(^{53}\) Fullscreen on View - An Exploratory Study on the Background and Psychosocial Consequences of Webcam Child Sex Tourism in the Philippines, Terre des Hommes The Netherlands, The Hague, 2013, pag.20

\(^{54}\) Ibid, pag.14-15

\(^{55}\) Ibid, pag.40-41

\(^{56}\) Ibid, pag.17


\(^{58}\) Webcam Child Sex Tourism - Becoming Sweetie: a novel approach to stopping the global rise of Webcam Child Sex Tourism, Terre des Hommes The Netherlands, The Hague, 2013, pag.14
who engage in WCST often do not want, or do not have the opportunity, to speak out about what they are subject to.

To break the circle of silence and raise public awareness on webcam child sex tourism, Terre des Hommes Netherlands decided to take a stand against impunity and start a campaign to track and report child abusers on the internet. For 10 weeks in 2013, four researchers of the organization accessed 19 public chat rooms posing as a pre-pubertal Filipino child. Their aim was to explore the extent and dynamics of WCST by interacting with sexual predators online, and gather information on their identity. The whole undercover operation was carried out without hacking the predators’ computers or seeking direct contact with them; all the researchers had to do was signing up to chat rooms with a nickname clearly stating their age (9-12) and origin (Filipino). As soon as they appeared online, they received hundreds of requests for sexual contact by adults from all over the world; most of them were very direct in asking the child to perform sexual acts and some even showed their genitals or other indecent images. They all seemed to have done this before and were confident they were not running any risk by buying sex from a child on the internet; this is one of the reasons why it was so easy for the researchers to obtain personal information on them and track their identities. By the end of the 10-week research period, they had interacted with over 20,000 people and identified 1,000 predators from 71 different countries. Twenty of them were approached through a custom designed computer model called Sweetie_1000, which looked and moved like a Filipino girl and was used to interact with pedophiles who appeared to be reluctant to give personal information without seeing the person they were talking to.

In general, researchers noted a very low perception of risk among perpetrators, who seldom adopted some kind of privacy measures when contacting children or making online payments. This is a sign that WCST is seen as a risk-less activity which rarely leads to identification and prosecution of offenders. Indeed, predators have a good reason to believe so: before the start of the Terre des Hommes' investigation, only six people had ever been convicted for this crime. This also means that raising public awareness on the phenomenon and informing criminals they could easily be tracked could be a good strategy to decrease the incidence of WCST. The Sweetie project alone has shown thousands of predators worldwide that online child sex tourism is not something they can get away with, and has made it a topic of public concern in the Philippines. In just a couple of years the police, government and civil society have completely changed their approach towards this issue; law enforcement agencies are now carrying out raids to identify existing “dens” and put perpetrators behind bars, while several peer education and social recovery programmes have been created at a local level to help child victims.

In October 2014, an Australian citizen was the first person tracked by Sweetie to be prosecuted and convicted for WCST. Although this is undoubtedly a sign that governments are taking a stand against child sexual exploitation, a lot is still to be achieved. The ‘Sweetie’ research has proven that it is relatively easy to trace and identify sexual predators. Now it is time for national and international authorities to start pro-active policing.

59 Ibid, pag.48-55
60 Ibid, pag.55-56
5. Final recommendations for European policy makers

In the last decade, several steps have been taken towards a better protection of children against online threats, and effective cooperation and investigation strategies have allowed for a more effective prosecution of offenders. However, there is still need for further policy reforms to be made in order for legislators, law enforcements and civil society to effectively tackle child sexual abuse.

I. Prevention

Online sexual abuse prevention programmes should be included in all sexual education courses. Educational materials should be age-specific, easily accessible and presented in a child-friendly way. Moreover, they should be designed bearing in mind that the difference between difference age groups: while younger children should be trained on safe use and access to the Internet and practical refusal and resistance techniques, older teenagers need to be informed about legal implications, risks and dangers posed by the transmission of sexual images, and approach methods used by online groomers. In regards to this issue, it is important to highlight that dangers could come from their peers as well as adults, and to encourage them to participate in peer support schemes, advocacy and awareness raising to promote responsible behaviour in their social group. Teenagers often prefer to develop their own strategies and solutions, a tendency that must be encouraged by educators for its empowering potential. Young people should also be involved in the evaluation of existing material and educational programmes. Moreover, it is absolutely necessary to consider the adolescents' need to explore and learn about sexuality and sexual health. Children have the right to seek information about these issues, regardless of the adults' embarrassment in dealing with the sexual sphere. What parents and educators deem to be appropriate for the child may not be what they need to know to develop a good understanding of sex-related risks; moreover, adults' and children's perceptions of what an inappropriate or dangerous online behaviour is may very often differ. Taking risks and breaking rules is typical during adolescence and children of this age should be allowed to “explore” sexuality (e.g. accessing pornography, engaging in sexual behaviour with peers) without being over-controlled and repressed by families and society. They must be informed about which behaviours carry which risks, instead of simply being told not to engage in them. It is important not to demonize technology, promoting a safe and responsible use rather than prohibiting it; parents should learn to mediate their children's activity online while also respecting their privacy.

Moreover, education has proven to be the most effective way to prevent self-risk or self-destructive behaviour such as online prostitution. These behaviours pose particular problems as those who engage in them are completely oblivious to the risks (especially the long-term ones) they are taking. Not only do they fail to perceive the harms posed by some online activities, they also do not see themselves as victims and are difficult to mainstream into rehabilitation programmes.

Interventions should prioritize vulnerable groups, including children from low-income families, children in foster care, migrants, previous victims of abuse and LGBT children. These groups are more prone to violence, partly because they may live in or circulate in rather marginal environments. In particular,

64 Ibid, pag.25
LGBT children are more exposed to discrimination and stigmatisation; rejected by their families and marginalized by society, many of them end up living in the streets, falling victims of prostitution and exploitation\textsuperscript{65}. When going online, they may search information about their sexuality and try to get in touch with people of the same sexual orientation. To support these children in their discovery process, there is a need to create safe spaces for them to obtain information on LGBT issues and organizations. It should be made easy for them to find professional help online and to report cases of abuse to local helplines.

II. Legal and law enforcement measures

To achieve uniform legal protection of children on a global level, it is paramount to harmonize national laws on sexual offenses against children. A huge leap forward has been taken by the EU with the entry into force of Directive 2011/93, which defines a child as any human being below the age of 18. Nevertheless, neither the Directive nor the Lanzarote Convention set a uniform age of sexual consent across Europe; their provisions link the definition of this concept to national laws, which vary greatly from country to country. To ensure uniform legal protection and avoid a situation where offenders travel to some countries with less restrictive laws to commit their crimes, European legislators need to agree on a common legal framework for the prosecution of such crimes. Fictitious child pornography (such as simulated child pornographic images, images of adults looking like children and cartoons portraying child abuse) is a particularly sensitive issue that needs to be addressed promptly. This kind of material is widely used and collected by pedophiles, and the way it portrays children may very well nourish predators' misconceptions about children and sexuality. Directive 2011/93 and the Lanzarote Convention leave it to the States to decide whether to criminalize the production and use of fictitious material; however, it is recommended that any material suggesting the involvement of children in sexual relations be banned on safety grounds.

Time limitation is another crucial issue. A uniform limitation should be agreed upon by national legislators, possibly to start when the victim reaches the age of majority\textsuperscript{66}. The most serious among these crimes (namely child sexual exploitation, child prostitution or child sexual abuse) should not have a statute of limitation; legal provisions should explicitly exclude the criminal liability of victims who were forced to participate in the abuse or perpetrate violence against others.

Also, specific provisions could be introduced to reverse the burden of proof of the age of persons portrayed in child sexual abuse materials, so that it lies on the people producing, distributing and/or possessing them. This step has already been taken in the Netherlands\textsuperscript{67}.

On a law enforcement perspective, States should be given the authority to prosecute all sexual crimes against children, including those committed against one of their nationals, by an habitual resident in their territory, or for the benefit of a legal person established under their jurisdiction. Article 17(2) of the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, pag.52
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid
\end{flushleft}
Directive provides for this possibility, which should be taken up by all member States and encouraged by the EU.

Collaboration between national police agencies is paramount to ensure full implementation of legal reforms. It is important to strengthen cooperation and exchange of information at a European level, with a view to improve the existing regional network of law enforcements, reinforce investigation instruments such as INTERPOL's ICAID database and broaden the action of specialized centers like the European Cybercrime Center. There is also a need to monitor programmes which started under the framework of international initiatives, e.g. the Global Alliance against Child Sexual Abuse Online.

Law enforcement measures require adequate funding. National governments and the EU must ensure that sufficient funds are allocated to conduct research on child abuse, train police staff and develop investigation tools to track and identify victims and offenders. Child sexual abuse crimes should be prioritized by all member States. Periodical research needs to be carried out by all stakeholders to collect updated information on the type of offenses taking place and their incidence, and thus defining which counteractions are required accordingly.

III. Advocacy and policy making

Some researchers and experts working with child sexual abuse material believe it is time to stop the use of the misleading term “child pornography” when describing images of sexual abuse of children. Instead, these pictures and videos should be described as what they are: child sexual abuse material. Pornography is a term used to define sexual acts by consensual adults, which are distributed to the general public for their sexual pleasure. This industry has nothing to do with child sexual abuse material, which involves children who cannot and would not consent and who are victims of a crime. Terms such as “child porn” risk normalizing the phenomenon by comparing it to a legal business, thus making it seem more acceptable both to perpetrators and the public. Sometimes these terms are present in the wording of national laws, which makes it even harder for lawyers and institutions to dismiss their use. Fortunately, European and national legislators are now starting to fully understand the need to employ more appropriate terms; policy makers and law enforcement should contribute to this change by being precise in their terminology.

To successfully advocate for political action, it is necessary to involve and mobilize civil society, public stakeholders and the private sector. In particular, NGOs operate as a focal contact point between government institutions and the public. In the coming years, the European Commission should try to enhance the role of non-governmental organizations in implementing and monitoring existing programmes, by establishing a supranational network in charge of coordinating actions to stop online sexual abuse of children. This network should conduct in-depth research to investigate the growth of child exploitation on the internet and on ways to combat it. Private sector industries also play a major role in providing support and consultation to fight child online abuse. Internet service providers, mobile phone companies, social networks and the online payment industry need to ally and create an integrated strategy to promote safer use of internet for children and to ensure the speedy deletion of illegal websites.

Interpol, [www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Crimes-against-children/Appropriate-terminology](http://www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Crimes-against-children/Appropriate-terminology)
An example of excellent campaign in all these regards is the Safer Internet Day, created in 2004 to promote a safer use of online technology and mobile phones, especially amongst children and young people across the world. Celebrated every year on the second week of February, it is now supported by 107 countries and 44 private sector industries. The celebration lasts for several months every year and involves different stakeholders (children, parents, teachers, public authorities and the private sector) who are encouraged to get informed and take part in the debate on online safety. The event focuses on a different topic every year (in 2015, the theme will be “Let’s create a better internet together”) and is organized by the Insafe and INHOPE networks with an aim to make the public aware of dangers on the internet, encouraging them to surf safely and report illegal content.

IV. Victim protection

To ensure perpetrators of child sexual abuse are identified and prosecuted, we need to encourage children to report abuse and to seek assistance when experiencing harm. There are several reasons why victims are reluctant to involve the police in their personal lives: they are ashamed of what they have witnessed, scared of being judged by adults and society, and reluctant to inform their families of what happened to them. Lack of trust in the police is also a major problem, as young people from lower social classes are particularly distrustful of law enforcement and the judicial system. The same goes for their parents, who may not want to expose their children for fear that the system will re-victimise them. It is noted that similar difficulties occur in relation to trafficking in children, as victims are rarely willing to testify and a great deal of effort is required from social workers to gain their trust. For these reasons, it is paramount to reach victims through educational programmes and materials aimed at informing them on the benefits of disclosure, and increasing their trust in the police. These programmes should be offered in schools, youth centers and social welfare institutions; personnel working with children should be given tailored training to recognize abuse and offer help to victims, with an aim to mainstream them into the legal system. It is equally important to build child-centered victims support strategies, which should involve all relevant stakeholders and ensure children are adequately assisted throughout the reporting and legal process. Law enforcers and justice officers need to be trained on how to deal with sexual abuse victims, and collaboration with psychologists and social workers must be constant during all stages of the proceeding. A multi-disciplinary team has to be put in place to define and implement the necessary measures, enabling the different players to comprehend and complement each other’s tasks. This team should operate according to a strategic protocol established as part of the intervention strategy, serving as a set of guidelines for all cases of child sexual abuse.

It is of utmost importance to provide victims with immediate therapy and treatment. First of all, a great effort must be put in identifying victims and reaching them. If the victim is already known to police authorities, he or she should be offered treatment since the early stages of the investigation process. It should be the police and legal officials' responsibility to inform children and their families of available therapies, which should be seen as an integral part of the investigation process; if necessary, the child's wellbeing should be prioritized over the need to ensure a fast proceeding. Given the importance of

69 Safer Internet Day, www.saferinternetday.org
70 Richardson J., Awareness raising to combat online sexual violence, from Protecting children from sexual violence – A comprehensive approach, Council of Europe, 2010, pag.297
71 Coccaro R. and others, Child Abuse Images and Sexual Exploitation of Children Online, ECPAT International, Bangkok, 2009, pag.27
providing adequate support to the victims, psychologists and therapists should undergo specialized training to acquire a deep knowledge of what online sexual abuse is, and how it differs from traditional child abuse. Only by researching and exploring this issue can the necessary specialized treatments be developed.

Recent studies\textsuperscript{72} have also shown that empowering children is a very effective way to improve resilience and recovery: training can be provided to young people through information sessions in schools, age-appropriate informative material, and psychosocial treatment for victims of abuse.

\section*{V. Child perpetrators and sexually harmful behaviour online}

A particular problem is posed by young people who manifest harmful sexual behaviour online. This issue is largely ignored by legal instruments such as the CoE Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Abuse and Directive EU/2011/93 combating the sexual abuse of children, creating a gap that has resulted in significant disparities among national legislations. In many countries, child perpetrators are held criminally liable for creating, exchanging or disseminating indecent material that portrays minors. Such provisions fail to take into account the reasons behind these acts, as well as teenagers’ limited understanding of criminal law. While the widespread use of ICTs provides young people with growing opportunities to engage in illegal activities, legislators and legal officers remain generally unaware of the importance of offering therapeutic and rehabilitative support to minor offenders. Instead of referring them to the juvenile justice system, legal authorities should deal with adolescent perpetrators from a child protection perspective: they need to be offered therapeutic support, psychological counseling and rehabilitative programmes to understand the risks of dangerous online behaviour and avoid engaging in such behaviour again. It is important to involve the child’s family, school and community in this process, to facilitate re-integration and raise awareness on the risks posed by harmful online conducts. Schools should neither minimize these acts, nor marginalize and isolate the authors; although disciplinary measures may help them and other students understand the dangers of such behaviour, they also need to be assisted in their rehabilitation process.

There is a general tendency to consider boys as the only perpetrators of online sexual harassment, while girls are traditionally seen as victims. In the UK, for example, the law has historically focused on the protection of girls, and only recently has the term ‘girls’ been replaced by ‘children’\textsuperscript{73}. Nowadays however, both boys and girls manifest sexual behaviour online and can engage in abusive acts. In some countries, girls are even more active in seeking sexual contact via ICTs\textsuperscript{74}: this must be taken into account when developing prevention and rehabilitation programmes, which should not underestimate the possibility that boys fall victim of abuse and exploitation. This is especially true for LGBT children, who are more exposed to such threats and need to have access to informative material tailored to their needs and characteristics.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{73} Ibid
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6. Final recommendations for Cyprus: legislation, policy and practice

The adoption of Law 91(1)/2014 on the prevention and combating of sexual abuse, together with the ratification of the Lanzarote Convention in November 2014, demonstrate the commitment of the Cypriot government to enhance the protection of children online. Measures to protect child victims and prosecute offenders are already in place and relevant laws have been successfully implemented by police and public institutions. At this point in time, public policies should focus on prevention and education to increase children's resilience and parents' awareness. Schools are a key player in this mission; their efforts should be concentrated on increasing the digital literacy and the safety skills of young people (especially young children who gain internet access for the first time), so that they are able to protect themselves whenever they encounter something harmful. Parents should also be trained on recognizing and dealing with online threats, especially in the cases where children meet new contacts offline. 

It is equally important that parents learn to communicate with their children on these matters, monitoring their activities without being scared of new technologies. Building an open and honest dialogue on the risks they may face is the best way to show young people they can trust their caretakers, and refer to them in case of need. Those parents and teachers who are not internet savvy should be able to receive information in schools and public offices.

Mobile devices are a particularly pressing issue, that needs to be addressed in schools and media by teaching young people to make responsible use of chats, text messages and social networks. Recent studies show that sexting is on the rise in Cyprus, representing the main feature of abusive relationships between teenagers today. In order to fight this phenomenon, prevention is paramount. Legal sanctions and discipline alone will not teach young people how to use the internet safely and respectfully; a national programme should be implemented to educate youths on dangers posed by sexual behaviour online.

On a law enforcement level, measures taken by the Cyprus Police to implement Law 91(1)/2014 have proven effective to improve officers' skills in dealing with abused children. The fact that reported cases of child sexual abuse have tripled since 2013 proves that a significant effort has been made in regards to this issue. For the future, it is important that specialized trainings be made available to law enforcement and the judiciary on a regular basis and that special emphasis be placed on methods to interview and protect child victims.

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76 Lesta S., STIR: Safeguarding Teenage Intimate Relationships: connecting online and offline contexts and risks, in Gender Based Violence and Safety in New Media – Conference by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, 31 October 2014, Nicosia
7. Conclusions

Information technology is now part of children's daily lives, representing both a resource and a threat for their safety. Computers, internet and mobile devices have radically changed the way young people discover sexuality and communicate with each other, exposing them to new risks coming from their peers as well as adult strangers. Moreover, technology has enormously increased the availability of child sexual abuse material, making it easier for offenders to produce, exchange, distribute and access such material and facilitating anonymous connections.

On the other hand, ICTs have also proven crucial in developing new law enforcement strategies to help police and public authorities fighting child exploitation. The use of internet has allowed for the creation of transnational cooperation and communication tools, such as Europol and INTERPOL's victim databases, and for the implementation of ambitious prevention campaigns on a European scale. Both the public and the private sector have recognized the importance of new media in combating child sexual abuse, creating new strategic partnerships to tackle this issue and block harmful content online; good practices such as the Global Alliance or the European Financial Coalition have demonstrated that coordination and cooperation are necessary to stop ongoing exploitation and dismantle criminal networks.

Notwithstanding the importance of criminal measures, special emphasis must be placed on prevention and awareness raising campaigns. Adults and children need to be educated on the dangers posed by new technologies, with a view to encourage dialogue between parents, teachers and young people, and to build resilience among children. As new generations gain access to the internet at an increasingly young age, they need to get a thorough understanding of online risks and develop their personal coping skills. Active participation of children and adolescents in this process is paramount to effectively prevent online sexual abuse.

Even though a lot is being done to protect children from online threats, we can expect new challenges to arise on a continuous basis. While criminal techniques evolve constantly to ensure offenders' anonymity, challenges are also created by the changing ways in which children use technologies and live their lives online. The awareness-raising and training actions planned by different stakeholders, both for the public at large and for law enforcement authorities, are already addressing these issues. But continued efforts will be required to ensure that we are able to find appropriate responses to emerging obstacles.
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