**EU contribution to the** **call for inputs:**

**Special Rapporteur on the sale and exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material**

**Introduction**

The European Union (EU) would like to thank theSpecial Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children for the call for contributions to the thematic report to be presented to the 76th session of the General Assembly. The contribution from the EU is comprised of examples of initiatives in internal and external actions, and focuses on the gender dimension.

The European Commission has a responsibility for fighting illegal content online and more specifically the dissemination of child sexual abuse images online. For over 20 years, as part of the Safer Internet policy (addressed at children and young people), the EU has been supporting cooperation between law enforcement, internet industries and civil society, in the EU and globally, to combat this crime. The principles of this policy are laid down in the *Better Internet for Kids Strategy*[[1]](#footnote-1), which includes combating violence against children and ensuring child protection (to be updated by 2022 as announced in the recently adopted *EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child*)[[2]](#footnote-2). The EU adopted the *Strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse* setting out concrete actions to tackle the growing threat of child sexual abuse by improving prevention, investigation, and assistance to victims. International cooperation is one of the key elements needed to combat child sexual abuse. In 2020, the EU continued to support the *WeProtect Global Alliance to end child sexual abuse online*, including by participating in its policy board.

One of the main tools for fighting child sexual abuse images online is the network of internet hotlines, under the umbrella of INHOPE. The INHOPE network consists of hotlines around the world across six continents: Africa, Asia, Australia/Oceania, Europe, North and South America. They are connected by an IT infrastructure at INHOPE, which serves as the central hub, and process reports of online child sexual abuse images sent by internet users. They analyse the reports and the location of hosting service providers, and using “*hash*” technology across the network, forward details of confirmed child sexual abuse images to the relevant law enforcement agency, for criminal investigations and victim identification, and to the hosting service providers for content removal. The EU co-funds around 30 European internet hotlines and the INHOPE organisation. In 2019, INHOPE hotlines processed more than 320,000 online child sexual abuse images and videos. Statistics about the gender dimension present the following for the year 2019:

* 91% of victims depicted in reports assessed during 2019 were girls;
* 7% were boys;
* children of both genders were depicted in 2% of assessed reports.[[3]](#footnote-3)

These figures reflect the *online imagery dimension* only, regarding the *offline dimension* the figures seem to differ. Profound insights in the dark field of child sexual abuse have been revealed by a German study “Mikado Studie”.[[4]](#footnote-4) The findings show differences between boys and girls regarding offline and online sexual abuse in various aspects (figures below relate to the German population):

* 11.6% of girls and 5.1 % of boys experience sexual abuse in general;
* 5.9% of girls and 1.8% of boys experience disturbing sexual experiences online (this happens mostly in chatrooms and social networking);
* Women and girls disclose their abuse experience more frequently (up to 50%) to third persons than adult men (18%) and boys (8%);
* In average, girls seem to be older than boys when abuse takes place;
* Around 25% of adults who have online sexual contacts to minors are women, 20% of predators of offline sexual abuse are women. Boys are more likely to be abused by women than girls.

A meta-study on global level conducted in 2011 (it included the data of 331 studies with nearly 10 million participants) confirms gender-specific differences in the victims of child sexual abuse: 18% of women and 7.6 % of men said that they had experienced sexual abuse during childhood (11.8 % of all adults have been victims).[[5]](#footnote-5)

***How is gender and gender identity incorporated in existing legislative and policy frameworks on the eradication and prevention of the sale and sexual exploitation of children?***

As far as child sexual abuse online/illegal content online is concerned there is no gender-specific legislation or policy. Whether an image classifies as child sexual abuse image depends on the national legislation and definitions. Basic elements shared by all Member States across the EU for such classification are for example:

* material that visually depicts a child engaged in sexually explicit conduct;
* material that depicts the sexual organs of a child for primarily sexual purposes[[6]](#footnote-6)

The classification does not differ between genders and applies uniformly. The same applies for the process of detection and removal of online child sexual abuse material from the internet.

***Please provide contextual information on any existing good practices, policies or legislation, tackling sale and sexual exploitation of children that include a gender dimension that takes into account different gender identities.***

Boys and young men are less likely to report or disclose abuse situations. The reason may be that abuse of boys and young men is more of a taboo and it may result in reports less likely to be believed and actioned. Good practise non-EU, funded by UK government:

<https://www.survivorsuk.org/campaign/weseeyou/>

Issues related to violence against children, trafficking and child protection services are raised with governments in political dialogues, including with candidate countries and potential candidates in the context of the Stabilisation and Association Process. Many countries in the Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions have put in place specific measures to fight against the sale and exploitation of children, including child trafficking. The EU has been providing support in that regard. For instance, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EU funds a project implemented by CSO, which among others, works with the potential and identified victims and individuals at risk providing direct assistance, psychosocial support, medical services, free legal advice, but also free and anonymous reporting of trafficking. In in North Macedonia, the EU included gender perspective in the implementation of the project: Horizontal Facility action II 29 *Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in North Macedonia*. The EU supports Georgia in fight against gender based violence, which includes child, early/forced marriages.

***In what context do external environment factors exacerbate the prevalence and/or magnitude of sale and sexual exploitation of children? Do the vulnerabilities of the surrounding environment play a significant role in terms of rural/urban; war/conflict zones, different forms of migration, emergency contexts (e.g. natural & manmade disaster, climate change, COVID-19) and religious context.***

In 2020, Europol produced strategic analysis work in the area of child sexual abuse and exploitation online. Most notably, Europol released a dedicated report Exploiting Isolation: *Offenders and victims of online child sexual abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic* (June 2020), and a specific chapter on chapter (3) on the topic in its 2020 Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (iOCTA), published in November 2020. With the view to contribute to the EU’s input, Europol would like to share relevant findings of the recently launched 2021 EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) in the field of trafficking in human beings (extracted below). SOCTA is Europol’s flagship report, published every four years. It is the outcome of a detailed analysis of the threat of serious and organised crime facing the EU, providing information for law enforcement, decision-makers and the wider public.

*Trafficking in Human Beings (THB)*

* Sexual Exploitation: The sexual exploitation of victims of THB takes place in all Member States. The origins of victims of THB used for sexual exploitation in the EU are highly diverse. Victims of 55 different nationalities from five different continents have been reported. These victims are mostly female, both adult and underage. They are typically recruited using false promises of well-paid jobs abroad, to escape precarious living conditions, financial instability and social and familial hardship. Exploiters increasingly seek to exploit their victims in the context of supposedly voluntary business agreements. As part of these arrangements, the victims agree to engage in prostitution and hand over a share of their earnings in exchange for protection and support with administrative issues such as tax declarations, registration with chambers of commerce, or pension arrangements. This type of exploitation is particularly common in jurisdictions where sex work has been legalised. Traffickers increasingly meet and recruit minors online. The sexual services of exploited underage victims are offered on dating and escort websites, where they are usually advertised as adults. Traffickers also advertise child victims on dedicated websites where adults are specifically looking for sexual encounters with minors. Minors are also abused in clandestine settings such as pop-up brothels. However, some exploitation also takes place in public venues such as hotels, restaurants, sex, and night and strip clubs.
* Child Trafficking: Child trafficking is a heinous crime. The trafficking and exploitation of underage victims occurs across the EU and targets both EU and non-EU victims. Criminals traffic children under various types of exploitation. Female victims face sexual exploitation and forced marriages to adult men. Traffickers exploit children as domestic servants, or force them to beg, pickpocket, shoplift or sell items. Children are also trafficked and sold through illegal adoption schemes. Criminal networks comprised of both EU and non-EU nationals are involved in child trafficking in the EU. Trafficking networks involved in child trafficking can be divided into three main categories:
* criminal networks sexually exploiting both adults and minors;
* family clans abusing their children, or children of other families, and forcing them into begging, criminality and sexual abuse;
* criminal groups that are mainly involved in other criminal activities and make use of vulnerable children, often of non-EU origins, to perpetrate crimes.

1. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/european-strategy-better-internet-children> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://inhope.org/media/pages/the-facts/download-our-whitepapers/009c452175-1595854476/annualreport_inhope_2019.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <http://www.mikado-studie.de/tl_files/mikado/upload/MiKADO%20_%20Ergebnisse.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Stoltenborgh et al. (2011), see: <https://beauftragter-missbrauch.de/fileadmin/Content/pdf/Pressemitteilungen/Expertise_H%C3%A4ufigkeitsangaben.pdf> p. 42 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See art. 2 of Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2004/68/JHA <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32011L0093> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)