Council Working Group
on child online protection
Twenty-second meeting – From 12 (p.m.) to 13 February 2025

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Contribution from Terre des Hommes Netherlands

THE NEED FOR REGULATION OF THE INTERNET AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Action required

This report is transmitted to the Council Working Group on Child Online Protection **for information.**

Terre des Hommes NL
International Child Rights Organisation

Our mission is to protect children by preventing and stopping child exploitation. And by empowering children to make their voices count.

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Our work

Three thematic programmes:
- Sexual exploitation of children
- Child labour
- Humanitarian

Operational in Europe, Latin America, Asia and East Africa

Our programmes are based on evidence and research

Two programmes addressing the Online Sexual Exploitation of Children: Down to Zero, Safety for Children and their Rights OnLine (SCROL)

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Down to Zero: Step Up the Fight Against Sexual Exploitation of Children (SUFASEC)

6 Alliance members

2 regions: Asia and Latin America / 12 countries

2 recent pieces of research:

- Safety by Design (2023): Child safety by design that works against online sexual exploitation of children

- VOICE in collaboration with ECPAT and Eurochild (2024): Speaking up for change Children's and caregivers' voices for safer online experiences

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Safety for Children and their Rights OnLine (SCROL)

4 countries : Cambodia, Kenya, Nepal and the Philippines, and 7 local implementing partners

4 domains of implementation:
   Children and communities
   Law enforcement agencies
   Government and Institutions
   Private sector engagement - Internet and tech industry

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Safety by Design research findings (2022)

Participatory research in 10 countries.   Key finding: Digital platforms are unsafe for children and not transparent when it comes to their safety measures and their effectiveness.

It is urgent to implement a Safety by Design approach, putting user safety and rights at the center. It can help tackle OSEC by:

1. Creating safe spaces for children, ensuring anonymity and moderation by professionals
2. Ensuring privacy - preserving age verification and age assurance, and age-appropriate online experiences
3. Adopting Intelligent privacy by default as a standard for the industry
4. Adopting computational risk detection combined with risk mitigation strategies in collaboration with children

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VOICE research findings (2024)

483 children involved, aged between 11 and 17 and 6,618 caregivers across 15 countries in Europe, SouthEast Asia and South America

Key findings:
- Children displayed a high tolerance for risks, accepting this to be part and parcel of being online
- Children normalise the risk: "If you want to be safe online, you shouldn't be on social media!" (Girl from the Netherlands)
- Caregivers overestimate their knowledge of online safety and are not sufficiently equipped to respond to risks.

What matters to children:
1. They want more information about online safety
2. They want both privacy AND protection from harm
3. They want to be involved in addressing online safety concerns

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Recommendations from children and caregivers

- Children and caregivers want better regulations and effective sanctions against non-compliant companies

- Children urge platforms to take concrete actions to reduce the risk of them being contacted, befriended, and groomed e.g. pop-up warnings that present children with choices, and to prevent the non-consensual usage of photographs e.g. prohibiting screenshotting of Instagram stories

"Create legislation in Europe in which all sites are safe and punish those that don't comply — DeepWeb shouldn't exist." (Children from Portugal)

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SCROL: our efforts to support regulation of the internet and tech industry

- Nepal: with the Internet Service Provider Association of Nepal- ISPAN we developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for Internet Service Providers (ISPs). In 2025, we will advocate for the endorsement of these SOPs by the Ministry of Communication, Information, and Technology (MoCIT).

- Cambodia: we supported the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications to develop a model Child Protection Policy for companies in the Internet and Tech industry. In 2025., we continue our efforts towards the adopt of online child protection standards as a legal requirement.

In the absence of specific national regulations, securing the commitment of private stakeholders remains a significant challenge.

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Call for Action

All stakeholders working in child protection:

Enforce child rights in the digital environment and include the voices of children and caregivers at all times.

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Call for Action

Private Sector:

Apply a Safety by Design approach to increase access to information on digital rights and reduce OSEC risks.

Call for Action

National Governments:

Regulate the digital and tech industry and ensure regulations are broad enough and future proof to anticipate the evolution of technologies.

Thank you!

Need more information? Contact us:

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