ITU Global Program on Child Online Protection
"Creating a safe and prosperous cyberspace for children"

Executive summary

Kazakhstan: Child Online Protection

November 2022

Gratitude

Disclaimer

Summary

The Child Online Protection Study was conducted in accordance with the ITU Guidelines on Child Online Protection and taking into account the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment № 25 «Children's Rights in the Digital Environment», considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the fundamental changes in the digital environment in which children find themselves, namely the Internet of Things, Internet-enabled toys, online games, robotics, machine learning and artificial intelligence.

The report contains an analysis of the data collected and recommendations for the protection of children's rights and safety in the online environment, and for improving policy and regulatory measures to enable the development of the ICT industry in this area. The policy-makers can use this report to review data collection approaches to child online protection, to address gaps and shortcomings, and to update and effectively implement government policy on child online protection. In addition, this report can contribute to the development of new standards, approaches, tools and innovative solutions for the industry to ensure the safe and secure use of Internet services and other technologies for modern children.

In developing the methodology and preparing the research tools, an analysis of the main international and national documents on the protection of children's rights and ensuring the safety of children was conducted, and experience in preparing similar reports in previous years was also taken into account. The basic subjects and institutions of socialization of children in Kazakhstan, their basic functions and mechanisms of activity were defined. The normative legal documents defining and regulating the situation of children in the digital environment of the Republic of Kazakhstan (hereinafter – the RK) were reviewed, statistical data relevant to Internet content, criminal and administrative violations against children were studied, and tools and mechanisms to protect children in the online environment were reviewed.

Based on the results of the analysis, practical recommendations and proposals for improving the conditions for the protection of children in the online environment at the regulatory and industry levels were developed.

Report contents:

The report presents state policy and regulatory measures to protect children in the online environment. The main state agencies whose functional activities are related to the protection of children in the digital environment are reviewed. According to the regulations, these agencies include the Ministry of Education of the RK (hereinafter – the MoE of the RK), the Ministry of Information and Social Development of the RK (hereinafter – the MISD of the RK), the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the RK (hereinafter – the MIA of the RK) and the Ministry of Digital Development, Innovations and Aerospace Industry of the RK (hereinafter – the MDDIAI of the RK). In addition, the Committee for children's rights protection of the MoE of the RK is the key profile agency for the protection of children's rights. There is also an Ombudsman for Children's Rights in the Republic of Kazakhstan (hereinafter - OCR).

The normative legal acts and programs to ensure the safety of children in the online environment are studied. The report notes that during the years of independence, the country has ratified the main international documents on the protection of children's rights. Also, laws and decrees have been adopted, that prescribe the rights of the child. International and national legal documents have been developed to address the main problems and threats faced by children.

On September 1 2020, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in his address to the nation of Kazakhstan «Kazakhstan in a New Reality: Time for Action» gave a number of instructions to the Government to take measures to protect citizens, especially children from cyberbullying. This served as the basis for introducing amendments and additions to a number of legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the protection of children's rights, education, information and informatization.

In addition, the report notes that the state is taking a set of measures to prevent and protect children in the online environment in terms of monitoring and blocking content in the Internet resource and/or the Internet resource, where illegal actions against a child take place.

Diagram 1. Number of unlawful materials eliminated on the recommendations of the authorized body to eliminate violations of the law by the owners and administrations of Internet **resources**
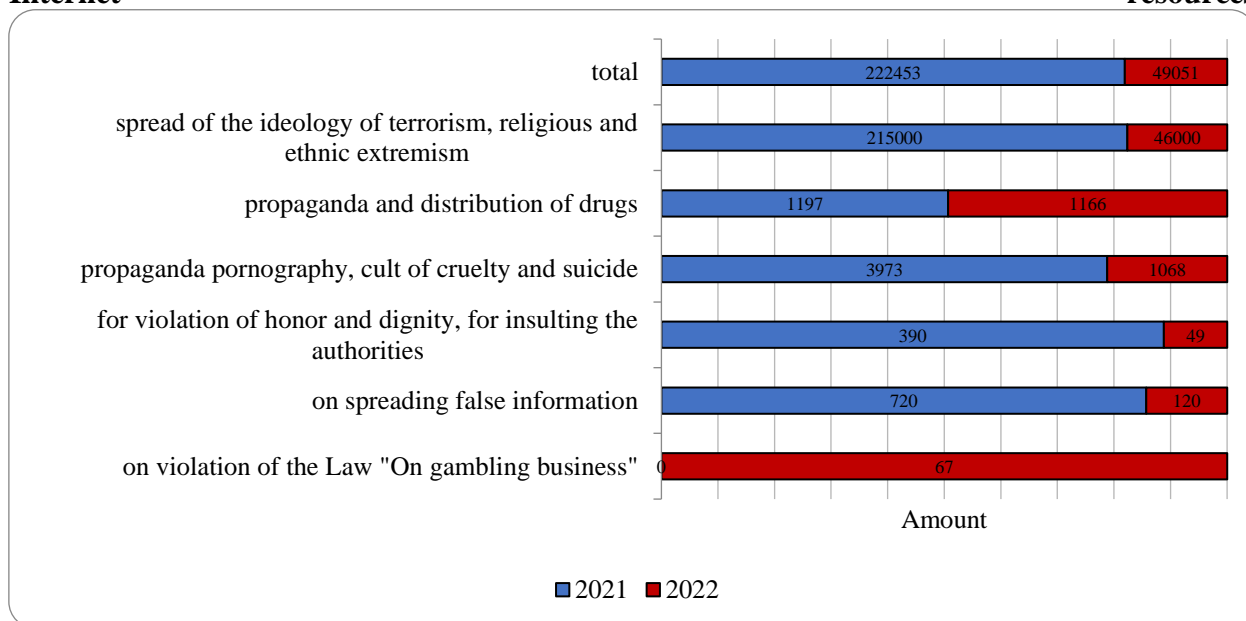

Since the beginning of 2021, in response to recommendations by the authorized body to eliminate violations of the law, the owners and administrations of Internet resources have taken

measures to remove about 222453 illegal materials; in the first half of 2022, about 49051 illegal materials were removed (Diagram 1).

In addition, online resources and social networks for counselling and psychological support and for submitting complaints and appeals operate in the sectoral government agencies. Campaigns are conducted to protect children and their rights in the online environment, and work is carried out to inform the public about protecting children from misconduct on the Internet and ensuring information security.

Below in Diagram 2 are the 2019-2022 online child protection publication statistics for the media - television, print, and online resources.

Diagram 2. Publication of materials on child protection in the online environment in the media through television and print publications
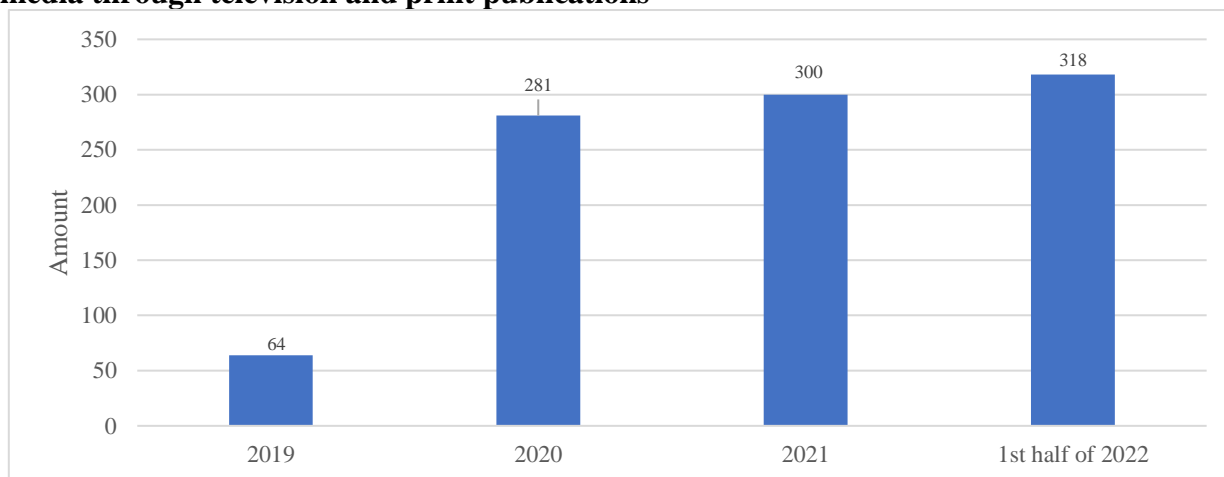
Despite the fact that the data for 2022 are provided for the 1st half of the year, this year more materials were published than in previous years, and in comparison with 2019, the publication of materials on the protection of children in the online environment has increased by 5 times (Diagram 3). This indicates that the Government of Kazakhstan pays great attention to informing the population about the dangers of the Internet environment.

In addition to television and print media, materials on child protection online and protection of the children's rights are published online. According to the 2019-2022 MEPI statistics provided, the number of online child protection materials published in 2022 is 9.4 times the number published in 2019. At the same time, 1.4 times as many stories were published online in 2022 as in print media and television. It should be noted that citizens prefer to obtain information through digital media rather than through standard ways of obtaining information.

Diagram 3. Publication of online child protection materials in the media through the Internet for the period 2019-2022.
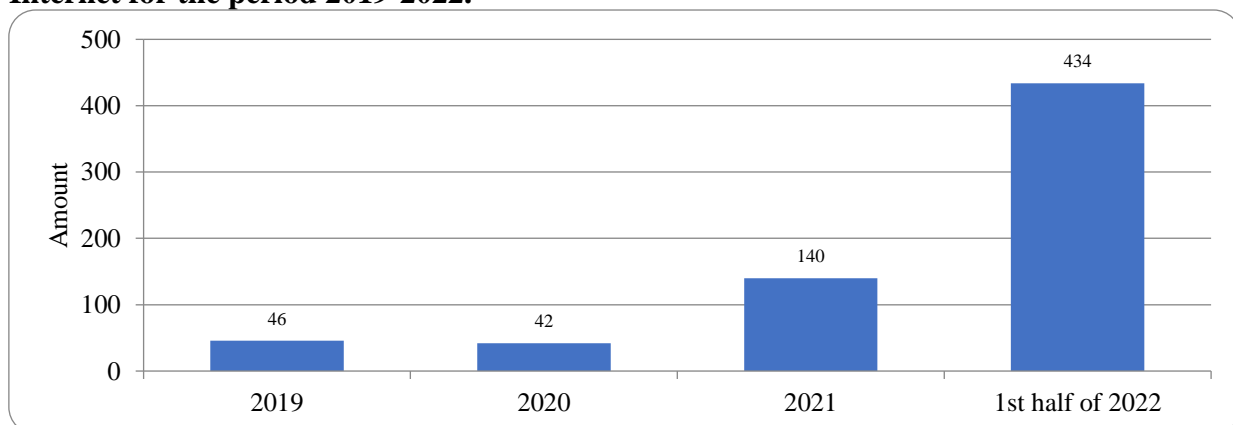
Thus, analyzing the current situation in the country we can say that the actions on the part of the state authorities regarding the protection of children in the online environment are provided not only at the level of adoption of changes in the NLA, but also in the implementation of appropriate measures. However, in addition to legislative regulation, it is necessary to educate parents and educational institutions in order to form a clear plan of action that can be used to support children and their protection in the online environment, including technical and practical solutions.

In addition, it is necessary to prevent the criminalization and sexual abuse and exploitation of girls and boys through telecommunications networks, including the Internet, and to record and monitor the crimes committed against children in the online environment. Currently, there are no statistics on criminal and administrative offences committed against children in the online environment.

The report also analyzes a number of ICT organizations and companies, as well as public organizations directly or indirectly involved in policies and processes to protect children in the online environment, among them:

−   organizations and companies that provide monitoring and elimination of threats and incidents of information security and cybersecurity: «State Technical Service» JSC, «Cyber Attack Analysis and Investigation Center» Company and «Kaspersky Lab» JSC;

−   telecommunications operators: «Kazakhtelecom» JSC and «Kar-Tel» LLP (Beeline Kazakhstan);

−   ICT companies: «KAZDREAM» Company, «Bilim Media Group» LLP and Microsoft Kazakhstan;

−   organizations uniting business entities: the Association of Legal Entities «Internet Association of Kazakhstan» (hereinafter referred to as the ALE «IAK») and Kazakhstan Association of IT Companies (hereinafter referred to as «Association»);

−   public organizations: the ALE «The Union of Crisis Centers», Crisis Center «Zhansaya», the Republican Public Council on Family, Women and Children's Rights of the «Amanat» Party and Foundation NeMolchi.kz.

The report cites a number of measures taken by these organizations and companies to protect children in the online environment.

One of the leading national companies providing assistance in ensuring and developing information security in Kazakhstan is «State Technical Service» JSC (hereinafter – «STS» JSC).

The Computer Incident Response Service (KZ-CERT) operates as part of the National Coordination Center for Information Security, created on the basis of the STS.

KZ-CERT provides users with online tools to check passwords for their reliability and to check Internet resources for malware and phishing links, as well as tips and advice for users on protecting children in the online environment.

STS also actively develops international cooperation. For example, KZ-CERT exchanges information about threats and information security incidents with organizations in countries near and far abroad.

«KAZDREAM» is a Kazakhstan IT holding company, one of the top 5 leading developers in Central Asia. The company specializes in the development of innovative IT products in the following areas: artificial intelligence and Big Data, public and information security, telecommunications and communications, state border protection, data collection, analysis and visualization.

One of the Company's projects is:

−   Information Security Operations Center, which provides services to detect, neutralize and prevent threats to information security.

−   The «Cybernadzor» IS is designed to optimize and systematize the work of government agencies to identify, evaluate and restrict access to illegal materials on the Internet.

«Kar-Tel» LLP, an operator of the cellular, mobile and wired Internet in Kazakhstan, this year announced the launch of the Safe Internet social project aimed at informing and teaching children how to behave properly in the digital world. In addition, the company provides a parental control service to protect children from unwanted content.

The company «Bilim Media Group» LLP, which provides interactive lessons for children on school subjects, notes that access to the portal is limited. Personal and group messages are monitored, and there is a privacy policy and user agreement.

Kaspersky Lab's «Kaspersky Safe Kids» application is one of the most popular products among parents in Kazakhstan used for parental control on a child's desktop and mobile platforms. In addition, at the Internet site of Kaspersky Labs parents can find useful materials on child protection in the online environment.

Among public organizations and foundations, the Republican Public Council on Family, Women and Children's Rights of the «Amanat» Party opened the contact center «Emergency service 111» so that children and adults could ask for help. This service is in contact with the Department of Internal Affairs of the MIA of the RK and regional task forces and receives appeals on all issues related to the protection of children, family and women's rights around the clock.

In general, industry organizations in the field of ICT in their activities apply direct or indirect measures to protect children in the online environment. It is worth noting that for industry companies the protection of children in the digital environment is not always a priority in their work, and mobile operators are not always focused on the development of tools and IT solutions to protect children in the online environment.

The functions and tasks of public organizations such as the Ombudsman for Children's Rights, Crisis Center «Zhan-saya», the ALE «The Union of Crisis Centers», the Republican Public Council on Family, Women and Children's Rights of the «Amanat» Party, the NGO «Association of Parents of Disabled Children «APDC» and others are aimed at protecting the rights of children and women, prevent violence against them and are indirectly related to the protection of children in the online environment.

Conclusion and findings

The analysis was based on data from a survey among government agencies, public organizations for the protection of children's and women's rights, organizations, and the ICT community. A total of 97 respondents from 26 government agencies and 17 organizations and companies participated in the survey.

The results of the analysis showed that at the level of public policy and regulation, Kazakhstan is not yet fully prepared to ensure the protection of children's rights and safety in the online environment. There is a need to review existing and develop new regulations to ensure the full inviolability, safety and protection of children's rights in the online environment. It is necessary to revise school educational programs and introduce the topics of cybersafety, cyber hygiene, and cyberculture.

At the same time, the IT market in Kazakhstan has few industry companies that are directly or indirectly involved in the protection of children online in their activities. In particular, ICT companies lack activities, projects and measures to protect children in the online environment. And in most cases, ICT companies' products and services are aimed at the adult population, i.e. they are not intended for persons under 18.

In addition to the importance of involving the Government of Kazakhstan and the ICT community in the issue of children's safety online, an important role is played by public foundations and organizations that provide counceling and psychological support to children and their parents, as well as assistance in solving their problems and issues. Such organizations can become active helpers in the formation of a safer online space.

The analysis of child protection measures in Kazakhstan has shown that despite the measures taken by the Government and industry companies, Kazakhstan still has much to do to

ensure the safe life of every child. Below are a number of recommendations given in accordance with the Guidelines on Child Online Protection for Policy Makers (Internet resource: https://www.itu-cop-guidelines.com/policymakers) and Industry (Internet resource: https://www.itu-cop-guidelines.com/industry) of the ITU:

For government agencies:
–   To develop a national strategy to protect children online, which is a very important document and a basis for constructive interaction between state authorities, organizations and public associations to protect children in the online environment.

–   It is recommended that universal systemic child protection mechanisms be put in place that obligate all parties working with children to identify, respond to, and report incidents of online violence and harm to law enforcement.

–   It is recommended that records of sexually abusive material (hereinafter - CSAM), particularly those who have already been convicted of such offences, be kept in order to take steps to restrict Internet access and conduct further monitoring of online activities.

–   One of the best ways to ensure the safety of children using the Internet is to provide them with the appropriate tools and knowledge that will help prevent and reduce risks for children. It is recommended that the development of digital literacy and the basics of safe use of the Internet be included in school curricula. This approach can be complemented by the creation of educational resources outside the school curriculum.

–   It is recommended to develop cooperation with institutions of higher education and innovation hubs and to support startup projects aimed at ensuring the safety of children in the online environment.

For industry organizations:
–   It is recommended to develop cooperation with state and law enforcement agencies, civil society representatives and hotlines in order to effectively address issues caused by CSAMs and to report their occurrence to the relevant authorities.

–   It is recommended to consider internationally recognized blacklists of URLs or websites compiled by relevant authorities (e.g., national law enforcement agencies or hotlines) to make it more difficult for users to access CSAMs already in place.

–   It is recommended that company and industry standards for the protection of children and young people be created and implemented in an industry-specific and characteristic manner.

–   It is recommended to prohibit the uploading, publishing, transmitting, sharing, or making publicly available content that violates the rights of any party or the requirements of local, regional, national, or international law.

–   Consider providing mechanisms, such as parental control programs and other tools, that enable parents to control children's access to Internet resources, while providing instructions on the proper use of such tools to avoid infringement of children's rights, as well as ways to explain the need for and importance of using such tools. These include black/white lists, content filters, usage monitoring, contact management, and time/program limits.

–   Provide parents with the information they need to understand how children and young people use ICT services, how to address harmful content and behaviour, and how to guide children and young people toward responsible use. This can be facilitated through the use of tools and by working with school education departments to develop online safety curricula and educational materials for parents.