

Background note on Child Safety Online - DG HOME

Child Sexual Abuse

On 24.07.2020, the Commission presented the EU Strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse¹, hereinafter “the Strategy”, which sets out a comprehensive response to child sexual abuse (“CSA”), both online and offline through eight core initiatives, covering legislative, and non-legislative initiatives.

A. Legislative framework

As part of the Strategy, the Commission adopted three legislative proposals to reinforce the legal framework to prevent and combat CSA:

- a proposal for an extension² of Regulation 2021/1232/EU on a temporary derogation from certain provisions of Directive 2002/58/EC as regards the use of technologies by providers of number-independent interpersonal communications services for the processing of personal and other data for the purpose of combating online child sexual abuse³, hereinafter referred to as “Interim Regulation”;
- a proposal for a Regulation laying down rules to combat and prevent child sexual abuse⁴, hereinafter referred to as “Regulation”;
- a proposal for a recast of the Directive on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child sexual abuse material⁵, hereinafter referred to as “recast Directive”.

1. Interim Regulation

a. Policy objective

The Interim Regulation allows providers of messaging services to voluntarily detect, report and block or remove online child sexual abuse material (“CSAM”) and grooming activities on their services. It allows them to process certain data by derogating from certain obligations under Directive 2002/58/EC (“e-privacy Directive”). It is intended to provide a temporary solution pending the adoption of the Regulation as a long-term legal framework, thereby avoiding a legal gap.

b. General timeline

The Interim Regulation has been adopted on 30.07.2021 and its period of application has already been prolonged once, until 03.04.2026. On 19.12.2025, the Commission proposed another extension of two more years, without changing the scope, to ensure that voluntary detection can continue until the negotiations of the Regulation conclude.

The Council adopted its position on 23.01.2026, without changing the Commission

¹ [COM/2020/607 final](#)

² [COM/2025/797 final](#)

³ [Regulation - 2021/1232 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

⁴ [COM/2022/209 final](#)

⁵ [COM/2024/60 final](#)

proposal. On 11.03.2026, the Parliament endorsed a temporary extension of the Interim Regulation until 03.08.2027, however reducing its scope, notably to known CSAM and by excluding end-to-end encrypted communications.

- **c. State of play**

Now that both co-legislators have reached their position, the Commission is supporting them in the negotiations to help ensure a swift adoption before the Interim Regulation expires on 03.04.2026. The first trilogue took place on 12.03.2026.

2. Regulation

- **a. Policy objective**

- The proposal, based on a thorough impact assessment⁶, aims to impose on providers of services at risk of online CSA an obligation to assess such risks and take mitigating measures. Only when such measures fail to reduce the risk, a judge or independent administrative authority will assess whether issuing a targeted detection order is necessary and proportionate. Detection orders are therefore a measure of last resort, which doesn't require or allow the indiscriminate scanning of private communications. In addition, the proposal foresees the possibility to issue removal and blocking orders⁷ (to be issued by a judge at the request of national authorities), reporting obligations for companies when they become aware of CSAM and grooming on their services, and the establishment of the EU centre to prevent and combat child sexual abuse.

- **b. General timeline**

On 11.05.2022, the Commission presented the proposal for the Regulation. The Parliament adopted its negotiating mandate on 23.11.2023, while the Council reached its general approach on 26.11.2025⁸.

- **c. State of play**

The Regulation is now in the inter-institutional negotiations phase, and the Commission is supporting the co-legislators to help ensure a swift adoption.

3. Criminal law framework on child sexual abuse - Recast Directive

- **a. Policy objective**

In parallel, a proposal for a revision of the criminal law framework (Directive 2011/93/EU) is being negotiated. The revised rules aim to ensure that all forms of CSA and exploitation are effectively criminalised, including those enabled or facilitated by new technological developments, such as AI-generated CSAM, grooming, live streaming of CSA, instructions on how to commit CSA, and the operation of an online service for the purpose of CSA. It also seeks to strengthen provisions on investigation

⁶ [EUR-Lex - 52022SC0209 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

⁷ Blocking orders represent a measure of last resort for material hosted outside the EU and companies without a legal representative in the EU.

⁸ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15318-2025-INIT/en/pdf>

and prosecution and introduce more specific requirements concerning prevention and victim support (e.g., by providing for mandatory background checks when recruiting a person for activities involving direct and regular contact with children).

. **b. General timeline**

The Commission presented its proposal on the recast Directive on 06.02.2024. The Council General Approach was adopted on 13.12.2024. The Parliament adopted its negotiating position on 17.06.2025. The interinstitutional negotiations were kicked off on 23.06.2025 and are still ongoing. The third political trilogue took place on 03.03.2026, the fourth will not take place before June 2026.

. **c. State of play**

The Commission is currently supporting co-legislators in the inter-institutional negotiations to ensure the swift adoption of the Recast Directive.

B. Non-legislative initiative: Network for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

A key initiative set out in the Strategy is the Network for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse⁹. This official Commission expert group¹⁰ is composed of 50 members, with representatives nominated by EUMS (27) as well as individual experts (12) and organisations (10) and a third country public entity (1).

. **a. Policy objective**

The Network's objective is to facilitate the identification and sharing of best practices, inform research, and support the development and implementation of rigorously evaluated prevention measures in a multidisciplinary and comprehensive approach to the protection of children from CSA. It provides expertise and advice to the Commission concerning all areas related to preventing CSA and exploitation, online and offline. It does not only focus on children and their environment, to reduce the likelihood of children becoming victims, but is also aimed at offenders and persons who fear they might offend.

. **b. General timeline**

The Network was established by a Commission Decision of 29.07.2025¹¹ and officially launched on 12.-13.01.2026. It will meet at least twice per year.

⁹ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/network-prevention-child-sexual-abuse_en

¹⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?lang=en&groupID=4011>

¹¹ [COM/2025/5252 final](#)

Protection of children against crime

Action Plan on the Protection of Children against Crime

- a. Policy objective**

As announced in the ProtectEU Strategy¹², to address the specific needs of particularly vulnerable groups such as children, who are increasingly exposed to recruitment and radicalisation, grooming and CSA, cyberbullying, disinformation, and other threats, the EU will develop an Action Plan encompassing the online and offline dimensions of their protection. It will set out a coherent and coordinated approach based on the available frameworks and tools, including EU bodies and agencies, and propose ways forward where gaps remain.

- b. General timeline**

The Action Plan will be developed by the Commission services by the end of 2026.

Radicalisation

A. Legislative framework

The Terrorist Content Online (“TCO”) Regulation is a key legislative initiative protecting vulnerable populations, including children, from exposure to radicalising material online.

- a. Policy objective**

The TCO Regulation requires hosting service providers to remove terrorist content swiftly, and in any event within one hour of the receipt of a removal order from a competent national authority. While it does not contain specific provisions targeting minors, its overarching goal inherently contributes to protecting children from exposure to such radicalising material online. According to Europol’s latest statistics, from 03.07.2023 to 28.02.2026, 209.455 removal orders of terrorist content have been issued by EUMS under the TCO Regulation.

- b. General timeline**

The TCO Regulation, applicable since June 2022, has been instrumental in reducing the online dissemination of terrorist content, as noted in the 2024 Commission report¹³ on its implementation. Ongoing collaboration between EUMS, Europol, and online platforms is essential to adapt to evolving threats and ensure the continued protection of vulnerable populations.

- c. State of play**

The Regulation is undergoing a comprehensive evaluation, to be presented in 2026.

¹² COM/2025/148 final

¹³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2024%3A64%3AFIN>

B. Non-legislative initiatives

1. EU Knowledge Hub on Prevention of Radicalisation

A key initiative is the implementation of the EU Knowledge Hub on Prevention of Radicalisation, announced in the 2020 Counter-terrorism Agenda¹⁴. The ProtectEU Strategy announced a new comprehensive prevention toolbox, which will be regularly updated, to allow for early identification and interventions focused on vulnerable individuals, in particular minors. The Knowledge Hub is currently supporting the toolbox' development.

The newly adopted Agenda to prevent and counter terrorism further details certain elements of the toolbox to foster resilience through education, safe online engagement, and psychological support in a whole-of-society approach involving stakeholders from various sectors, such as social and youth workers, educators, and mental health practitioners. Examples of the toolbox elements include:

- Parents' Guide to Protecting Young Minds: this paper aims to produce recommendations for parents on children's presence online.
- Practical models for hotlines and call centres for reporting and acting on signs of radicalisation.
- Research paper on how emotions and stereotypes at local level affect radicalisation processes among young people and minors.
- Guidelines for EUMS to incorporate prevention of radicalisation in national educational curricula, building resilience among children, teaching digital literacy, and responsible online engagement.
- Recommendations for EUMS to support parents in preventing online radicalisation.

2. EU Internet Forum

The EU Internet Forum is chaired by the Commission, and it brings together a wide range of institutions, organisations, and networks.¹⁵ At the most recent EU Internet Forum Ministerial meeting on 04.03.2026, participants examined strategies to safeguard minors from terrorism and violent extremism online, including threats stemming from traditional ideologies, such as jihadism, the rise of nihilistic, and hybrid extremist networks. It also points to the increasing intersection with other harms, such as exploitation, self-harm, and organised crime recruitment. It explores challenges in detection, prosecution, and cross-jurisdictional cooperation emphasising the need for a whole-of-society approach with stronger early detection, industry collaboration, and harmonised definitions.

Trafficking in human beings

Many children fall victim of trafficking in the EU every year. According to EUROSTAT's data, 17% of the victims of trafficking registered in the EU in 2024, 1.577 persons, were children. Many

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2326

¹⁵ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-union-internet-forum_en

more remain undetected. 69% of child victims with known form of exploitation were trafficked for sexual exploitation, 11% for labour exploitation, and 21% (also) for other forms of exploitation. The most common other forms of exploitation were forced begging or use for begging, criminal activities (4%), and forced marriage (2%). In 2024, 78% of child victims were EU citizens and 22% were non-EU citizens.

The online exploitation of trafficking victims has increased with the growing role of digital platforms and social media, creating new avenues for traffickers to recruit, groom, and exploit victims. Children are especially at risk due to their high presence online and their heightened vulnerability to deception and coercion.

A. Legislative framework: Directive (EU) 2024/1712

a. Policy objective

Directive 2011/36/EU, as amended by Directive (EU) 2024/1712, on combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, considers children always as vulnerable. This results in higher penalties for traffickers and specific protection and assistance measures for child victims. In addition, when a child is involved in the offence, the crime will be punishable as trafficking regardless of whether the subjective elements of the definition (e.g., deceit, coercion, use of force) are fulfilled. The Directive also strengthens EUMS' obligations to provide specialised and age-appropriate assistance and criminalise the use of services that victims of trafficking are forced to provide. It also recognises the online dimension of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation as an aggravating circumstance, and where sexual exploitation is committed or facilitated using information and communication technologies, it may lead to higher penalties.

b. General timeline

EUMS have until 15.07.2026 to transpose the amended Directive.

B. Non-legislative initiatives

1. EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings

a. Policy objective

The EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (2021-2025) follows a child-sensitive approach, highlighting the growing role of the online environment in child trafficking, the use of digital platforms for recruitment and control, including targeted actions to prevent trafficking and provide victim support to children.

b. General timeline

The Commission will present a new strategy in 2026 to better tackle emerging challenges like the increasing role of digital technologies and the impact of AI, and needs in preventing and combatting the crime and protecting its victims, including children.

2. Digital investigations under EMPACT

Digital investigations under the EMPACT¹⁶ framework became key to support innovative approaches, particularly in the form of Hackathons, which helped identify online platforms where sexual or labour exploitation take place. The 2026-2027 EMPACT cycle will include a dedicated Hackathon to identify child trafficking online.

¹⁶ European Multi-Disciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats.