

COMMITTEE: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

QUESTION: Implementing measures to decrease the number of minors entering the criminal world through social media

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Personal Introduction

Dear delegates,

My name is Melina Belessioti, I am 17 years old student in the LFHED, and I will have the pleasure to be your President of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and

guide you throughout the LFHMUN2025 alongside my vice president Eleonora de Moratti. I really hope this study guide will assist you to build a deeper understanding of the subject as well as take a clear look into the ongoing issues in the world we live in, while guiding you towards a clear and constructive debate.

I hope that the MUN empowers you to increase your understanding about these and other topics, some of which may be controversial. My wish is that everyone learns to listen actively, practice respect for others, and engage in debates with a constructive and positive light. You will have the opportunity to look into the world's most pressing and ongoing issues.

This, in my opinion, is what makes MUN really valuable: we have the opportunity to experience various perspectives, conditioned by various governments and legal systems.

I hope for effective communication with fellow delegates, such as teamwork that serves to develop exciting, interesting, and entertaining debates.

The issue we will be debating is implementing measures to decrease the number of minors entering the criminal world through social media.

Introduction

Social media is a major part of the lives of young people all over the world in the current digital era. Daily, millions of children and teenagers interact with platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat or X, around the world, because these have opportunities for creativity, education, social interaction and entertainment. However, there is a dark side of social media-misuse as a medium for crime: it is being used for targeting and coercing minors into illegal activities of various kinds. It creates an opportunity for criminal syndicates and individuals to use anonymity, wide reach, and sheer volume of the use of social media platforms to lure and prey on the young, particularly those at-risk, underserved, and low-income regions.

Social media is therefore a potent instrument used by criminal organisations to entice young people into engaging in illicit activities like drug trafficking, cybercrime, and even

violent crimes due to its accessibility and anonymity. Around 70% of illicit markets now involve juveniles to some degree, according to Europol, the EU's law enforcement agency.

The strategies used to control these minors include more subtle approaches like grooming, blackmail, or emotional manipulation, as well as outright recruiting through deceptive promises of money, power, or social approval. These projects target minors for a variety of reasons. Socioeconomic difficulties, a lack of parental supervision, peer pressure, and the internet glorification of illegal lifestyles are frequently associated with them. The risk of being exposed to such negative online impacts is increasing since many young people spend a large amount of their life online.

It is important to note that these kids are not the only individuals affected by this issue. Their families, communities, as well as global security is greatly impacted.

This is a matter that must be solved not just for the well-being of an individual but for all of society. Acts of crimes may lay an edge for young people; therefore, even a greater number of young people are getting involved in the criminal world, ruining their opportunities, and disturbing their lives. Laws to curtail the involvement of children in such activities require cautious and proactive strategy formulation. Therefore, this pressing and important issue requires input from various sectors: the government, social media companies, educators, parents, and community leaders.

Strengthening online safety laws, increasing awareness, and equipping minors with the right tools would reduce these hazards. It is also vital that we identify predator methods, those avenues susceptible to exploitation against the child, and then prioritize legislation, regulatory frameworks, or initiatives to ensure that the digital world becomes a safer environment for future generations.

Definition of Key Words

Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA): COPPA requires operators of commercial websites, online services, and mobile apps to notify parents and obtain their consent before collecting any personally identifiable information on children under the age of 13. The aim is to give parents more control over what information is collected from their children online.

Online Child Exploitation (OCE): Online child exploitation (OCE) is the practice of controlling, coercing, or exploiting minors through the use of the internet; it often involves human trafficking, forced criminal conduct, or child sexual exploitation material (CSEM).

Grooming: A process in which criminals build trust with minors in order to manipulate them, lure them and convince them to do illegal activities. Groomers often use social media, gaming platforms, and messaging apps.

Online Recruitment of Gangs: The activity by which gangs utilize social media as a tool, through music videos, or online forums to recruit and lure juveniles with false status, money, or protection.

Social Media Algorithms: Calculating system of sorts that predict what you will watch next and therefore present you with a personalised feed that is based on your recent searches and frequently visited pages. Such algorithms may expose children to material created to manipulate them unknowingly.

Digital literacy laws: Laws that promote internet safety education and help kids recognise online threats and steer clear of illicit manipulation. Digital literacy programs have been introduced in schools in most countries.

The act of radicalization through social media: The gradual spread of extremist beliefs among kids, usually via private messaging apps, online discussion boards, or customised content.

Cybercrime Prevention Act: Laws some countries enacted to prevent committing crimes enabled by the internet, such as recruiting children for illegal activities using the internet.

Social engineering scams: Dishonest and criminal tactics used by criminals to coerce children into sharing personal information or committing crimes; they are often promoted as internet challenges or commercials.

Socioeconomic Vulnerability: How poverty, the lack of education, and social instability influence a child's likelihood of being drawn to criminal behaviour, including through social media.

Crime: A conduct which constitutes an offence and is liable to legal punishment.

Cyberbullying: A form of harassment or bullying through the use of electronic devices including social media. These include threats and blackmail that can lead to severe risks for the victim, where the oppressor manipulates them or forces them to do things they refuse to do.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR): A wide-ranging privacy and data protection framework which became a law in May 2018 in the European Union. Its purpose is to protect the personal data and privacy of EU citizens and offers them more

power in terms of how their personal information is collected, processed, and stored by pooling organizations.

The Protecting Young Victims of Sexual Abuse Act of 2018: Law passed in the United States to ensure guards raised on minors against sexual assaults, exploitation, and trafficking. It majorly includes minor's issues with organizations by online contacts, especially social media, and related to some activities of amateur athletics.

Parents and guardians: Individuals with the legal obligation and authority to protect, nurture, and care for any child or minor. While they are not directly involved in the criminal world, their ignorance and neglect often act as contributing factors for the vulnerability of children to exploitation. When minors are deprived of any proper guidance regarding internet safety, it just becomes a matter of time when those minors will unknowingly become involved in criminal activities. There is a need to educate parents about the threats existing online.

General overview

The Growing Influence of Social Media on Minors and Its Risks.

For countless minors of today, social media is ever present in their lives, providing ample opportunities to socialize, express themselves, and entertain. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, among others, have transformed the way minors socialize with peers, explore personal interests, and share content on a global scale. While these platforms have their positives, they come with mounting concerns, one of the most alarming being the exploitation of young users by networks of criminal activities.

The past decade has witnessed unprecedented growth in teenage social media use, a phenomenon acknowledged in varied studies and statistical data. A great majority of research determines that most minors utilize their social networks several times a day. The overall increase in social media has risen by an incredible 36% growth in only six years due to a plethora of pressing factors. Support of widespread availability of cheap smartphones, access to faster Internet services, and creation of social platforms with a youth appeal-all have made it easier for any young person to use social media today. The opportunity of peer influence also comes into play, where any young person feels the pressure to stay engaged with current online trends, challenges, and discussions to maintain their social standing.

Causes

- **Unregulated Access and Anonymity**

Social networks are created to enhance communication among mass users enabling almost instant connection, often not trying to confirm their identifications. In one sense,

this is a good thing, but it can also be a proposition for the criminals against innocent minors. The intention of harm is easily carried out by those creating bogus identifiers, impersonating others, and becoming therefore undetectable by true witnesses whose evidence would help the assurance of creating harm.

- **The Importance of Rapid Growth of Social Media Among the Minors**

As social media is becoming increasingly available to young people, it becomes threatening. Teen social media use for the last six years has risen by 36%, due in large part to cheap cell phones, wider internet access, and an increase in the popularity of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. These apps invite younger users by applying multiple addictive factors, including customizable algorithm-based content; gamification (likes, streaks, challenges, etc.); and constant connectivity.

- **Psychological Trap**

Adolescence is a period of searching for acceptance, social belongingness, and independence. Many minors in need of emotional escape due to loneliness, low self-esteem, or personal problems resort to social media. Criminals prey on these emotional vulnerabilities by posing as friends or mentors, offering a sense of belonging, money, or excitement. There are those who might have young persons engaged in something that sounds innocent-such as delivering a package-but that is an illicit act, such as trafficking drugs or committing fraud.

- **Glamorizing Criminal Lifestyles**

Certain trends of the social arena and influencers glamorize illegal activities by portraying them as thrilling, and even profitable. Oftentimes, videos showing flashy lifestyles, expensive goods, and reckless behavior are glamorizing crime to those impressionable ones. Some online enclaves normalize criminal and violent acts, further goading minors to engage in acts that might very well put them in severe trouble, legally and otherwise.

Consequences

- **Legal and Criminal Implications of Minor Involvement in Crime**

A juvenile caught up in criminal acts usually suffers legal consequences such as being arrested, facing a trial, and obtaining a criminal record. At an early age, criminal records severely limit future opportunities for an individual, particularly in education, job provision, and travel, making reintegration into society challenging.

- **Psychological and Emotional Harm**

Crime, even when committed under pressure or trickery, leaves deep psychological strain in almost all minors. Exposed to violence or other dangerous situations, many individuals experience trauma and feeling guilty, and suffer from fear because they see, hear, or are forced to do things that involve these elements.

- **Increased Family and Society Tension**

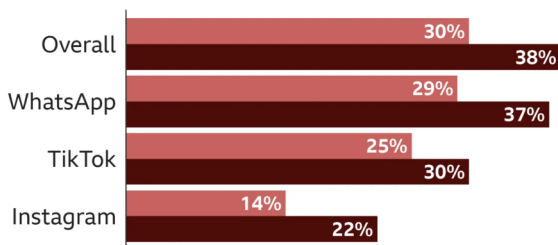
When minors get into the weeds of crime, they will often find damaged ties to families and communities that were once flourishing. Legal troubles can mean disappointment and distrust, which can result in social isolation and the disintegration of social ties. Some may never be able to extricate themselves from the criminal milieu, which results in being even more entrenched in criminal activity.

- **Heightened Crime Rates and Societal Disparities**

The involvement of minors in criminal networks heightens the crime cycle and contributes to raising the level of crime in society, thereby burdening law enforcement and legal systems. This also creates large-end swathes of social problems, such as neighborhood insecurity or higher incarceration rates and wastages on a young cadre of individuals who would be assets to society.

How the percentage of five to seven-year-olds using social media has risen in one year

■ 2022 ■ 2023



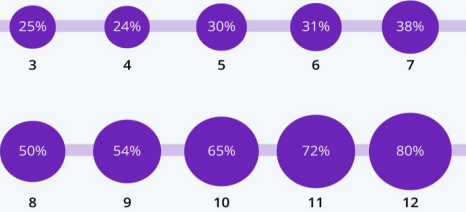
Based on responses from 1,509 parents in 2022 and 749 parents in 2023

Source: Ofcom

BBC

Kids on Social Media

Share of parents in the UK saying their child has a social media profile, by age



n=2,400 UK parents of children aged 3-17. Conducted Oct-Dec 2021.
Source: Ofcom

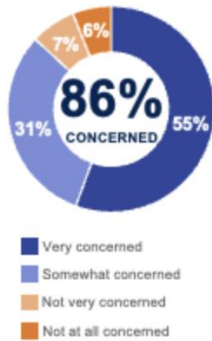


statista

Majority concerned about impact of social media on children's mental health, say parents are most responsible to prevent harm

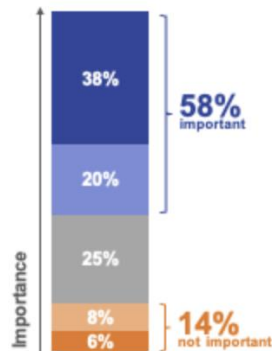
Concern for impact of social media on children's mental health

(All Americans)



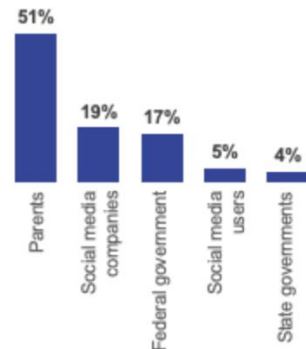
Importance of federal government addressing the impact of social media on children's mental health

(Americans at least "not very concerned")



Who should be most responsible for preventing harms on... the impact of social media on children's mental health?

(All Americans)



Source: Knight Foundation/Ipsos poll, fielded January 27-29, 2023

Base: All Americans (N=1,021); At least "Not very concerned" for "The impact of social media on children's mental health" (N=962)



Case Study: Australia – eSafety Commission's "Online Child Exploitation Disruption" Initiative

Yet again, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of minors targeted via social networking platforms in Australia because of groups that employ encrypted communication tools to groom and commercially exploit children. The eSafety Commissioner, an independent statutory office, came up with the Online Child Exploitation Disruption program as part of the 2020-2021 strategic plan. In the Commission's Annual Report 2020-2021, the office reported receiving more than 21,000 reports regarding online child sexual exploitation material, which is 29% higher than last year. The increase, which caused alarm bells to ring about the misuse of gaming apps, message services, and video-sharing platforms, for instance, furthering other crimes against minors, such as drug trafficking and distribution, beyond sexual abuse, went on.

Testimony from Julie Inman Grant, eSafety Commissioner (2021):

https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-10/ACMA%20and%20eSafety%20annual%20report%202020-21_0.pdf

"In the 2020–21 financial year, eSafety received over 21,000 reports relating to online child sexual exploitation material — a 29% increase from the previous year. We removed harmful material in collaboration with platforms and referred information to the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) and INTERPOL."

Key measures have been put in place such as the setting up of an Image-Based Abuse portal and a Report Harmful Content tool which would help users to easily report suspicious activities without the fear of repercussions. During the last year of 2021, as per records of the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE), 1,277 children were removed from imminent harm by actions partially catalyzed through these activities under the digital disruption efforts. Notwithstanding the achievements so far, the eSafety Commissioner still calls for regulation of age verification for apps accessing minors by default. The Australian experience demonstrates that without an overarching transformation in the design of such social media platforms, isolated and individual initiatives, however effective, cannot totally put an end to the criminal grooming of minors over the internet.

Action type	Radiocommunications interference	Domestic systems interference	Total interference
Total complaints received	259	175	434
Complaints received by service type	Mobile network operator: 171 Non-mobile network operator: 74 EPIRB/public safety: 14	TV: 141 Radio: 34	
Total compliance enforcement actions*	59	12	71
Advice notice	34	10	44
Warning notice	25	2	27

* Compliance enforcement actions issued for interference tasks created in the 2020–21 year.

Source: eSafety Commissioner (2021)

Case Study: Kristen's Story – Groomed via Instagram in Houston, USA

Online predation becomes an easier task with social media platforms, such as Instagram. In 2019, Kristen, a teen from Houston, was groomed via Instagram's direct messaging by a criminal syndicate that took advantage of her vulnerability and eventually trafficked for sex.

Testimony of Kristen's Mother (2024):

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/feb/02/mother-hunt-houston-daughter-instagram-meta-sex-trafficking-grooming?utm>

"If Instagram didn't exist, this wouldn't have happened to my daughter."

Kristen disappeared again after coming home; she was maltreated again, thus continuing to reveal the important part that social media plays in grooming and trafficking. Kristen's mother hunts after her, and this case is exemplified in the never-ending plight of keeping minors safe from online predators.

Case study: United Kingdom – NSPCC's "Wild West Web" Campaign Against Online Grooming

Even with the current measures put in place to regulate online spaces, children in the United Kingdom are always at the risk of being exposed to active recruitment by criminal groups through social media avenues. These, in turn, have drawn the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) to launch a campaign dubbed Wild West Web in 2018 to pressure the government to take drastic measures on tighter regulation of tech companies. Between 2018 and 2019, police in England and Wales recorded more than 5,000 online grooming offences, an increase of over 80% compared to the previous year. Many of those took place on major platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat, which were poorly monitored with respect to predatory behavior aimed at minors.

It has been successful to regulate certain online spaces in the United Kingdom with regards to children, yet they remain prime grounds for active recruitment by criminal groups through avenues offered by social media. The NSPCC (National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children) has initiated a campaign slated Wild West Web in 2018 harnessing public pressure on the government to tighten its control on tech companies. In the period between 2018 and 2019, a total of about 5,000 offences online boarding the matter of grooming were reported by police authorities in England and Wales- a documentation of more than 80 per cent compared with the previous year. Of those, most were committed in the big social platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat in which the monitoring against predatory behavior was performed poorly relative to minors.

Testimony of Peter Wanless, CEO of the NSPCC (April 2019):

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/06/19/social-media-firms-exploit-children-like-drug->

[barons-head-](#)

[nspcc/?utm_source=chatgpt.com&ICID=continue_without_subscribing_reg_first](#)

“The Wild West Web campaign highlighted a dangerous lack of regulation in online spaces where children were spending a huge amount of time. Groomers and criminals operated with almost total impunity. Our advocacy resulted in the Online Safety Bill proposal, which aims to enforce a duty of care on platforms to prevent criminal activity including the grooming and recruitment of children.”

Starting from continued lobbying efforts and public awareness campaigns, the UK Government, in 2021, prepared the Online Safety Bill so that it would introduce legally binding obligations on online firms to protect minors from scenarios of criminal exploitation. According to a report issued by the NSPCC in 2020, in 52% of cases in which the platform was known in online child sex offences, the platform involved was one owned by Facebook. Thus, it is claimed that this legislation is an urgent requirement to stop the recruitment of young people into criminal activities by means of social networking. On the flip side, critics say that even now, there are restrictions on enforcement mechanisms, and tech companies still mostly dominate these regulatory processes.

Nevertheless, scientific studies and data presented by the NSPCC indicate that the systemic failure to protect young users online is a great contributor to the booming growth in child criminal exploitation, and the Wild West Web, in that context, has truly helped.

Case Study: Daniel's Involvement with Drug Gangs via Snapchat – UK

In North London, Daniel, a teenage boy was recruited through Snapchat into a drug-dealing network. At first, the gang offered him cash-in-hand work and lodging, but he soon progressed into the illegal distribution of drugs.

Testimony of Daniel's Mother:

https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-kent-56717403?utm_

“Smartphones are teenagers’ entire world... Losing their phones feels like a bereavement. We still live the trauma, all of us as a family. I've had extra locks put on the doors. You're living a nightmare, even now. Even though my son's safe, I still worry if he goes out.... These people are getting away with so much. It's out of control. We know that county lines teams use social media to groom young people, but as a response to that we work with our safeguarding teams and our partners in our local authority. What I would say to parents is - look at your children's phones, look at who they're mixing with. When they go to school, who are their new friends they're interacting with? Children have more than one social media account and parents have to get back to old-fashioned parenting and actually challenging

their children on where they're going, who they're mixing with, and actually asking children for their passwords."

Despite her efforts to intervene, Daniel's involvement with the drug dealer grew stronger, pointing to the difficulties of parents protecting their children from online exploitation and other criminal associations. His account serves to alert other parents to the dangers of social media platforms, for this is usually where predators go after vulnerable youth.

Concerned countries and organizations

Countries

Afghanistan: Ethnonationalists align themselves with the Taliban in redirecting susceptible children in far-flung villages under the guise of civic and religious activities, and this is done through secret messaging applications.

Brazil: Gangs and violence impose a great strain on Brazil, particularly within marginalized areas where recruitments of minors are done via the online medium. Consequently, the government is already beginning to take initiatives regarding online recruitment but that is not one of its principal challenges. The issues that Brazil faces today include an increased influence of drug cartels and their extension into favelas in particular utilizing social media to capture minors.

Central African Republic: Armed groups and criminal networks increasingly use online platforms to recruit minors. With limited access to education and employment, some youth groups see no alternative, which leads to an increasing rise in their involvement in illegal activities.

Colombia: Colombia has faced organized crime with a heavy emphasis on drug trafficking for a long time. Increasingly, these crime syndicates have been using social media to recruit minors for their drug-running operations and cybercrimes. Encrypted social media platforms were used by FARC and other armed groups, promising urban and rural youth financial gain and a sense of belonging. The Colombian government has launched some processes to counter these networks by creating opportunities for an at-risk population of youth. But social media is still a strong recruitment tool because of historic instability and economic disparities.

El Salvador: The state considers the country militarized, yet gangs continue the recruitment of youth on the Internet. The government is unable to regulate content on social networks or impose explicit preventive-oriented digital programs.

France: Within French national limits, child exploitation and the recruitment of minors using any digital means or platform is forbidden. Concerning regulation, social media also faces tracking and public awareness campaigns aimed at decreasing exploitation. In specific, cybercrime gangs have begun using social media to solicit young people for defrauding and online extortion.

Guatemala: Little internet safety education and high levels of violence promote conditions under which minors get easily manipulated by online criminal recruiters.

Honduras: Criminal elements like MS-13 recruit teenagers on Facebook. Prevention programs are small in scope and do not extend to rural or marginalized communities.

Italy: Different government policies to counter child exploitation by organized crime and social media have been enforced by the Italian administration. The government has also been creating laws related to child protection and developing national databases in this context. From the standpoint of Italy, the exploitation of children by Camorra and mafia groups could be done by utilizing social media as the center for selecting vulnerable youth to recruit them to these groups.

Lebanon: Abduction and exploitation of children in refugee camps and undeveloped areas take place through social media platforms like Facebook and Telegram.

Mali: Jihadists use online videos and messaging platforms to recruit young boys in areas where there is little schooling and minimal state presence.

Mexico: Mexico, high in organized crime and under the influence of drug cartels, is one of the top countries that has involved minors in criminal activities. One of the growing trends is that social media platforms are being used to recruit people into drug trafficking and gangs. It has become a burgeoning issue as "cartel influencers" have pounced on recruiting teenagers via Instagram and Snapchat, regardless of government's counteractions against such phenomena.

Nigeria: One of the major hurdles that Nigeria faces is restraining the youth from being recruited into cybercrime activities, especially through social media by the Yahoo Yahoo (internet fraud) gangs. The yahoo boys have started on a journey to recruit minors using platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram, promising them riches from illicit activities.

Pakistan: Being used social media along with mobile associations to lure teenagers renders the radical groups generally invisible to the eyes of local law enforcement.

Philippines: The country faces a growing issue wherein minors come under recruitment into online scam and cybercrime gangs, usually via platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, or Telegram. Poverty, combined with digital access but without education, exposes children to exploitation by syndicates. Though the government of the Philippines has enacted

cybercrime laws, their enforcement along with protection for the youth remains weak, especially in the countryside and in poorer areas.

Syria: Recruitment of child soldiers by ISIS and affiliated groups takes place via Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. There is no oversight or governance in these war-torn areas.

Turkey: Turkey faces the issue of minors being recruited into ISIS and other extremist groups, often via social media. The Turkish government has drafted several measures- alongside digital surveillances and an awareness campaign- to combat the issue. Recruitment of minors for ISIS, facilitated by social media, has been a significant concern in Turkey.

UK: The UK appears to have taken some active measures to implement the Modern Slavery Act 2015, which specifically includes measures attempted to stop minors from being recruited for illegal activities through social media. However, online anonymity is an issue that casts doubts on the realization of the effectiveness of these laws. This advancement in social media has resulted in a rise in the County Lines drug trade, targeting vulnerable minors in both rural and urban areas.

USA: With the increasing concerns about the recruitment of minors for criminal acts online, especially on social media, the U.S. has been working toward laws such as the Preventing Online Sex Trafficking Act, which primarily intends to curb the exploitation of minors. The question remains as to whether the U.S. can cope with the enormity of the internet and such a vast unregulated space for minors being exposed to criminal elements. In 2021, more than 20,000 minors were sex-trafficking victims, being reported through online platforms.

Venezuela: Given this crisis, minors become very vulnerable. Gangs use social media to propagate the criminal way of life and recruit youth with promises of income and security.

Organizations

Child Rights International Network (CRIN): CRIN is a global organization dedicated to research, policymaking, and advocacy. They champion children's rights in the digital space. Reports are published showing how social media platforms fail to prevent the exploitation and recruitment of minors into criminal networks. In 2022, CRIN called for more stringent international accountability measures for tech companies as well as joined efforts with other NGOs in legislation in the UK and EU that seeks to protect minors from online exploitation.

ECPAT International: ECPAT stands for "End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes," and it's a network of organizations working to end the sexual exploitation of children. One of the major areas of the intersection between marketing and parenting is researching how crime syndicates use online platforms to groom

and recruit minors into illicit activities-usually trafficking. "Online Child Protection" was initiated by ECPAT in 2019 towards a call for government enforcement of stricter regulations for technology companies and social media platforms. ECPAT collaborates with Interpol and private partners to enhance online monitoring technologies.

Internet Watch Foundation (IWF): IWF fights online child sexual abuse. But the mission is also extended to the observation of wider misuses of social media-for example, grooming children for gang involvement. The 2020 report of the IWF included findings that there was a 25% increase in crimes conducted against children through encryption services. They provide technical solutions for the companies and the government for detecting criminal contents.

WeProtect Global Alliance: WeProtect Global Alliance has emerged as the primary international coalition uniting governments, tech companies, and civil society organizations in their collective cause to eliminate online child sexual exploitation. It has published some major policy papers, including the "Global Threat Assessment" of 2021, clearly indicating how children are recruited to participate in cybercrime and drug-related activities through online platforms. The organization helps countries devise state-specific multi-pronged action plans that combine education, law enforcement training, and tech regulation.

UNICEF: UNICEF acts as an advocate on a global scale for the protection of children in digital environments. UNICEF has conducted awareness campaigns (e.g., #ChildOnlineSafety) and provides assistance to governments in framing internet governance laws from a child perspective. In 2021, UNICEF initiated the "Child Online Protection Initiative," whereby it advised countries on the establishment of national strategies preventing online criminal recruitment of children.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC): It is a non-profit organization based in the USA, which runs the CyberTipline for NCMEC, and it deals with online threats to children. They have recorded a spiking number of minors involved in drug trafficking and in schemes of cybercrime through such global platforms as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. NCMEC intensively cooperates with the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security to disrupt recruitment through these portals.

Latest Developments

As digital platforms continue to grow, there's been more attention from authorities, schools,

and NGOs on how criminal groups are using social media to recruit kids. Even though there are more efforts being made, progress is still all over the place.

2015	The UNODC puts out a report warning about gangs going after vulnerable kids online. It highlights the need to act quickly and improve digital skills.
2018	The EU Commission begins with its EU Internet Forum which prompts tech companies to proactively search for and remove content that endangers children. Gang recruitment videos are deleted by Facebook and YouTube.
2020	A document was released by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime that emphasizes the importance of school-based prevention programs as well as social media surveillance aimed at protecting minors from being groomed.
2021	WePROTECT Global Alliance extends its focus from sexual exploitation to social media recruitment and calls on countries to implement a comprehensive national strategy that combines tech legislation with youth-serving policies.
2022	Brazil and Colombia implement the social work of a teacher of digital safety as part of their classrooms in favelas and urban areas, for at risk youth digital citizenship.
2023	UNICEF works collaboratively with TikTok and Instagram to initiate Safe Click which uses AI technology to track down predatory accounts then routes children to resources or helplines for aid.

2024	In the thirty-third session of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ), a new resolution has been adopted, requesting member states to work towards native criminal justice systems.
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UN involvement

UNODC

The UNODC is highly relevant when preventing online exploitation of minors for criminal purposes. In its 2020 Global Program on Cybercrime, UNODC states that *“children are vulnerable to online recruitment by criminal groups for activities ranging from drug trafficking to cybercrime”* (UNODC 2020). To counter this, UNODC has initiated the Education for Justice (E4J) Program, aimed at *“developing skills such as critical thinking among youth to build resilience to crime, violence, and corruption, particularly online”* (UNODC E4J 2019). They also provide training to strengthen law-enforcement efforts to combat child online exploitation, especially in Southeast Asia, where social media is a common platform for perpetration.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

In 2021, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted General Comment No. 25 on the risks that children face in online environments. It states that *“States parties should ensure that children are protected from risks of recruitment by criminal networks through digital platforms”* and encourages governments to adopt *“robust child protection policies online”* (CRC, General Comment No. 25, 2021). Hence, countries are now under a clear legal obligation to actively regulate online spaces in which children may be exposed to criminal recruitment.

UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

The UNHRC Resolution A/HRC/47/L.13 (2021) recognizes the protection of children from online exploitation. It also *“encourages States to take legislative, administrative and other appropriate measures to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse facilitated through the use of information and communications technologies”* (UNHRC, Resolution A/HRC/47/L.13, 2021). This includes the exploitation of children for profit, hence necessitating multi-pronged interventions across government sectors.

UNICEF

In this domain, UNICEF has been most active. According to their report, Digital Civic Engagement by Young People, *“children’s use of online platforms, while bestowing opportunities, also makes them susceptible to risks of exploitation and recruitment into illicit activities”* (UNICEF, Digital Civic Engagement, 2021). That is why UNICEF calls for strengthened safeguarding policies from the national level and within the digital platforms themselves. The Child Online Protection Program of UNICEF has also emphasized that governments should *“develop frameworks to regulate online content, work with industry, and strengthen law enforcement to prevent children’s involvement in organized criminal activities through digital channels”* ([UNICEF Child Online Protection Report, 2019]).

International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

An organization associated with the United Nations, the ITU, updated its guidelines on child online protection in the year two thousand and twenty, primarily to adopt new threats. In other words, *“children are at risk of being groomed into criminal behaviour including trafficking, cybercrime, and radicalization via digital platforms”* (ITU, Child Online Protection Guidelines, 2020). The ITU works with its member states in ensuring that child protection has been mainstreamed into their national cybersecurity strategies and advocates the industry’s accountability in making online spaces unattractive for criminal exploitation.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime): UNODC works internationally in tackling organized crime and has recognized the impact of digital channels to recruit youth in organized crime. UNODC has provided regional level training to law enforcement to assist in how to identify grooming and build their digital evidence capacity. UNODC has also supported states with national action plans and education campaigns focused on youth digital crime prevention.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION: The European Commission has initiated various strategies as part of its Digital Services Act and EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child to make the digital environment more age-appropriate for minors. The EU has been working with the leading

platforms to improve removal times of illegal content while calling for greater transparency in automated decision making that can subject minors to harmful networks or content.

INHOPE (International Association of Internet Hotlines): INHOPE operates hotlines in 46 countries to report illegal content online. While these hotlines were designed for child sexual abuse materials (CSAM), many of the hotlines have expanded their reporting to address gang recruitment and violent extremist content directed to minors. INHOPE hubs engage police and private sector stakeholders to ensure timely takedowns and subsequent investigations.

WePROTECT Global Alliance: This initiative has brought over 100 countries and global technology companies together to combat online abuse. Over the last few years it has also extended to the criminal exploitation of minors on social media. The initiative supports legislative change, training, and technology-based solutions to identify and block online grooming activity.

Legislations

Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (2001):

The Budapest Convention is a treaty that is orchestrated under the Council of Europe with 65+ countries signing the treaty. The treaty is aimed at fighting cybercrime with similar laws and means of cooperation. Although it is not expressly about the recruitment of minors for violence, it provides countries a framework to prosecute the behavior that expressly prohibits criminal actions online (e.g. grooming, recruitment of minors) and therefore should apply to the recruitment of minors online.

EU Digital Services Act (adopted 2022):

The Digital Services Act (DSA) was introduced to regulate several Big Tech platforms, and the prospective risks created by those platforms which range from child sexual exploitation to the exploitation of minors. The DSA requires on-platform risk and mitigation assessment of online activities on their platform related to children and young people who may be exploited that could lead to harmful activities including gang recruitment or organized crime's targeting young people.

Online Safety Bill (UK):

The Online Safety Bill is intended to become law in the latter part of 2024. This Bill legislates against criminal content, including grooming minors and requires platforms to

avoid criminal content and to "use technology" to pro-actively prevent criminal content from reaching minors and prompt reporting to law enforcement of offences.

Possible solutions

Legislations:

- Mandate online platforms to report criminal recruiting behavior.
- Impose strict, serious penalties against targeting children to recruit for a crime.
- Develop new law with new technology to mandate transparency regarding algorithm-based suggestions of content.

Companies:

- Institute capability to moderate content and potentially improve algorithms to detect the use of grooming or recruiting language.
- Develop commands for alerting real-time when content is flagged and automatic disablement of users that are suspected of grooming.
- Implement ID verification after threshold activity.

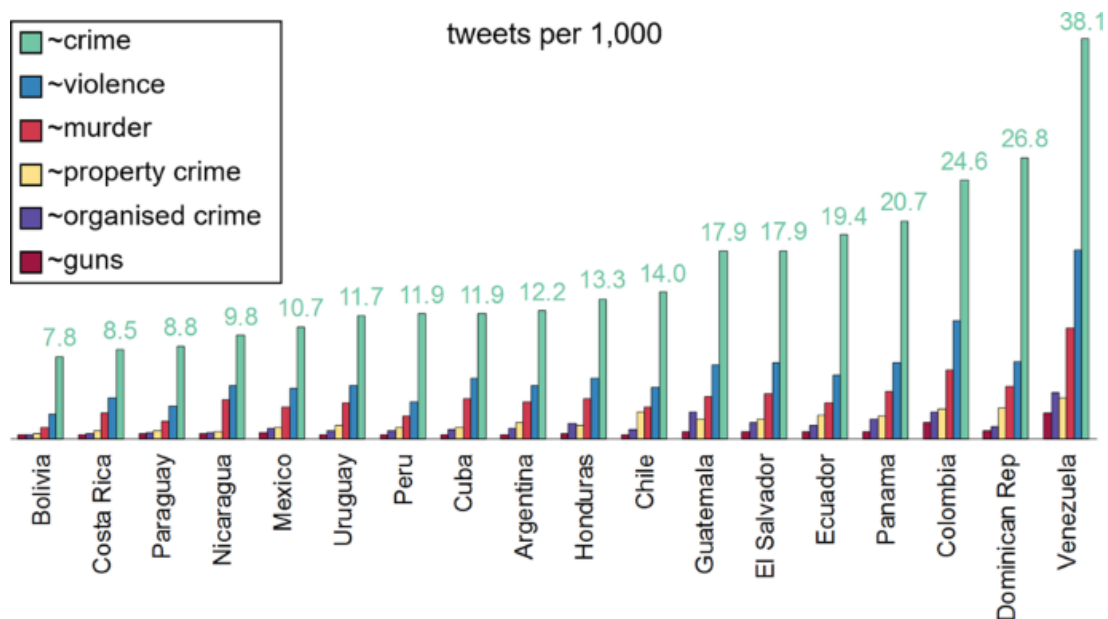
Education:

- Include digital literacy and online safety in Ontario school curriculum.
- Create campaigns to increase awareness to educate parents and educators about risk on social media.
- Create more peer-supported and peer-led initiatives, mentor at-risk youth.

Law enforcement and borders:

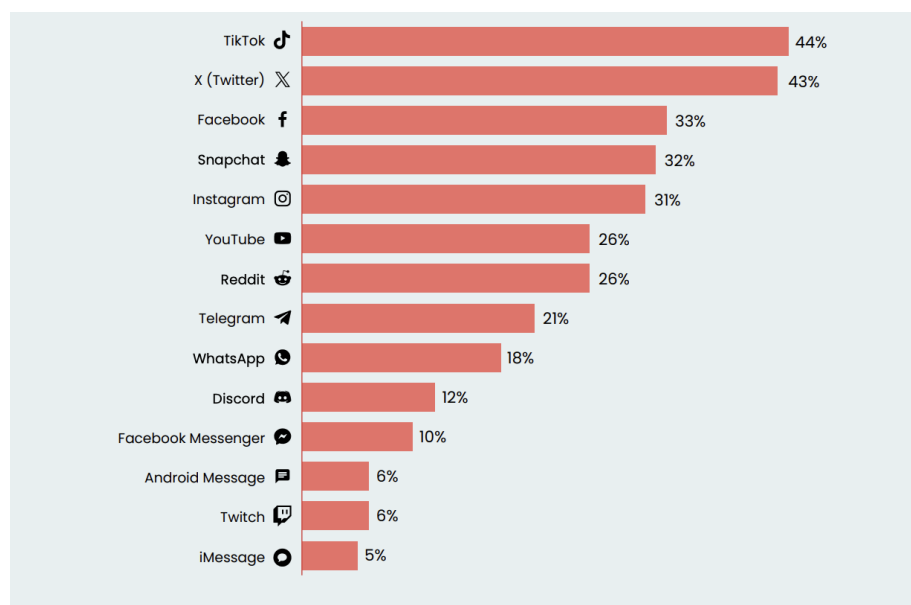
- Train detectives in digital investigation units to identify initial online recruiting behavior.
- Encourage global police collaboration to dismantle global digital crime networks.
- Investigate the legitimacy of encrypted platforms, and dark web forums with grooming cases that looked just like the regular form of crime against all children.

Annex



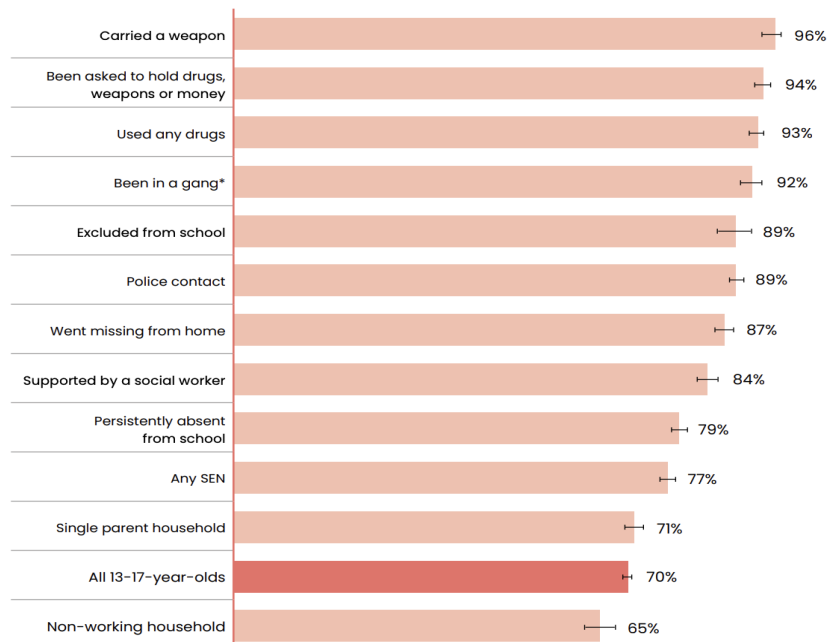
Crime-related tweets per 1,000 in 18 countries in Latin America.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-020-0430-7>



The proportion of children using social media platforms who have seen violent content.

https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/CVV24_R2_Online.pdf



The proportion of 13–17-year-olds who saw violent content online in the past 12 months by vulnerabilities to violence. https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/CVV24_R2_Online.pdf

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