

Open Letter to EU decision makers: Stop the Child Sexual Abuse Crisis now!

On this **World Day for the Prevention and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence**, we, a coalition of **77 organisations working on children rights**, urgently call on you to pass critical laws to protect children against sexual abuse and exploitation, online and offline.

Europe is facing a Child Sexual Abuse Crisis. Available data indicate that [about 1 in 5 children](#) in Europe have experienced some form of sexual violence. Children across all social, economic, cultural, and geographical backgrounds are affected, facing abuse in various environments - from family homes and schools, social media and gaming platforms to institutional settings.

Online, the scale, severity, and violence of child sexual abuse are spiraling out of control, with [over half of young people having experienced some form of sexual harm online](#) in their childhood. [More than 100 million images or videos of children being sexually abused](#) were found online last year, and this may be just the tip of the iceberg. [98% of these images show children under 13](#) years - children who have to live with the ongoing trauma of their abuse circulating online perpetually.

"For a very long time, I was very stressed, and I slept very badly [...] what would happen if those images came out, and what would everyone think of me? [...] in my head it had just sort of taken on this enormous catastrophic proportion that my life was going to end" - Nora, Survivor.

In an unregulated online world, children are easily contacted by offenders, manipulated to share intimate images and sent inappropriate content. The **online solicitation of children for sexual activities** (known as 'grooming') [increased by more than 300% between 2021 and 2023](#).

[Children as young as 3-6](#) are being groomed and coerced into engaging in sexual behaviour, including penetrative and sadism activities, via webcams. In absence of adequate safeguards, **encrypted platforms are used by offenders to exploit children with impunity**. In addition, advancements in [artificial intelligence](#) and virtual reality are being used to create child sexual abuse material with the click of a button.

It doesn't have to be this way. Together we can take action to end the Child Sexual Abuse Crisis and protect children from further harm.

EU Member States and Members of the European Parliament have a critical opportunity to adopt a strong EU legislative framework, with the [Regulation to prevent and fight child sexual abuse](#) and the [Recast Directive on Child Sexual Abuse](#). Those legislations must be tailored to the realities children face offline and online, and ensure comprehensive protection and prevention measures that ultimately safeguard children's rights. For this, the Regulation must enable the prevention, detection, removal and reporting of all forms of child sexual abuse content (including grooming) in all online spaces where children are present, including encrypted spaces. The Directive must criminalise child sexual abuse online as much as offline, extend the limitation periods for reporting and require States to provide an evidence-based, trauma-informed and child-centric response to child sexual abuse.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which EU countries are signatories, and General Comment n°25 of the Child Rights Committee is clear that the **best interests of the child** should always be front and centre in decisions relative to children. **We urge EU policymakers to act in full respect of international standards** when deciding on these pieces of legislation.

Together these tools can effectively tackle the current Child Sexual Abuse Crisis and create a safer internet, and childhood, for children in Europe.

Signed by:

1. ECLAG Steering Group formed by [Brave Movement](#), [ECPAT International](#), [Eurochild](#), [Missing Children Europe](#), [Internet Watch Foundation](#), [Terre des Hommes](#) and [Thorn](#).
8. Agarrados à Net (Clunged on the Net) - Portugal
9. [ARSIS Association for the Social Support of Youth](#) - Greece
10. [Association Elfen Rebirth](#) - France
11. [Bens Place \(Survivors West Yorkshire\)](#) - United Kingdom
12. [Børns Vilkår](#) - Denmark
13. [Bund Deutscher Amateurtheater e. V.](#) - Germany
14. [CAMELEON Association France](#) - France
15. [Canadian Centre for Child Protection](#) - Canada

16. CCA Chances for Children Association - Hungary
17. [Centre Plan&Go](#) - Albania
18. [ChildX](#) - Sweden
19. [Child Focus](#) - Belgium
20. ChildFund Alliance - EU
21. [Child Safety Line](#) - Slovakia
22. [Child Helpline International](#)
23. [Children's Rights Alliance](#) - Ireland
24. [COFACE](#) - EU
25. [CRCA/ECPAT Albania](#) - Albania
26. [Defence for Children International](#) - Liberia
27. [Defence for Children Netherlands](#) - Netherlands
28. [ECPAT Austria](#) - Austria
29. [ECPAT France](#) - France
30. [ECPAT Foundation Thailand](#) - Thailand
31. [ECPAT Norway](#) - Norway
32. [ECPAT Taiwan](#) - Taiwan
33. [ECPAT Türkiye](#) - Turkey
34. [eLiberare](#) - Romania
35. [Empowering Children Foundation](#) - Poland
36. [Federación de Asociaciones para la Prevención del Maltrato Infantil \(FAPMI\)](#) - [ECPAT Spain](#) - Spain
37. [FICE Croatia](#) - Croatia
38. [Fondation pour l'Enfance](#) - France
39. [Fondazione SOS il Telefono Azzurro ETS](#) - Italy
40. [Foundation Together Albania \(FTA\)](#) - Albania
41. [Fundación ANAR](#) - Spain
42. [Halley Movement Coalition](#) - Mauritius
43. [Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation - ECPAT Hungary](#) - Hungary
44. ["Hope For Children" CRC Policy Center](#) - Cyprus
45. [INHOPE – the International Association of Internet Hotlines](#)
46. [Innocence in Danger e.V.](#) - Germany

47. [Instituto de Apoio à Criança](#) - Portugal
48. [International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children](#) - Singapore
49. [Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children \(ISPCC\)](#) - Ireland
50. [Lastensuojelun Keskusliitto](#) - Central Union for Child Welfare Finland
51. [Lucy Faithfull Foundation](#) - UK
52. Maja Staško, journalist, activist, author - Poland
53. [Marie Collins Foundation](#) - UK
54. [MiudosSegurosNa.Net \(KidsSafeOnThe.Net\)](#) - Portugal
55. [National Child Helpline Albania \(ALO 116-111\)](#) - Albania
56. [National Network for Children](#) - Bulgaria
57. [Neglected Children and Women Foundation, ECPAT Bulgaria](#) - Bulgaria
58. [Network for Children's Rights \(NCR\)](#) - Greece
59. [NGO "Internet safety centre "Stop Sexting"](#) - Ukraine
60. [Novi Put](#) - Bosnia and Herzegovina
61. [Pancyprian Coordinating Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children](#) - Cyprus
62. [PFAD Bundesverband der Pflege- und Adoptivfamilien e.V.](#) - Germany
63. [Protect Children, Suojellaan Lapsia ry](#)
64. Rosalba Mirci, Individual member of Eurochild - Italy
65. [Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth](#)
66. [SOLWODI Deutschland e.V.](#) - Germany
67. [Stiftung Digitale Chancen](#), Germany
68. [SWGfL](#) - UK
69. [Tacteen Naeil - ECPAT Korea](#) - South Korea
70. [The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children \(ISPCC\)](#) - UK
71. [The Smile of the Child](#) - Greece
72. Tulir- Centre for the Prevention and Healing of Child Sexual Abuse - India
73. [Victim Support Europe](#) - EU
74. [We Protect Global Alliance](#)
75. [WWP European Network](#) - EU
76. [116000 Enfants Disparus](#) - France
77. [Women against Violence Europe \(WAVE\) Network](#) - Vienna-based & EU wide