

ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE & EXPLOITATION

Online child sexual abuse can be any form of sexual abuse of children which has a link to the online environment. It can take the form of, for instance, sexual molestation and/or harassment through social media or gaming. It also takes on an online dimension when acts of sexual abuse are photographed or video-/audio-recorded and then uploaded and made available online, whether for personal use or for sharing with others.

The term “**online child sexual exploitation**” refers to the use of the Internet as a means to exploit children sexually. The terms “ICT-facilitated” and “cyber-enabled” child sexual exploitation are sometimes used as alternatives. It includes all acts of a sexually exploitative nature carried out against a child that have, at some stage, a connection to the online environment that results in sexual exploitation or causes a child to be sexually exploited or that results in or causes images or other material documenting such sexual exploitation to be produced, bought, sold, possessed, distributed, or transmitted.

ECPAT International, [Luxembourg Terminology Guidelines 2016](#)

The Internet provides a world of opportunity for children and was a lifeline for many during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it also poses a **growing risk of exposing children to irreversible harm**. Prevalence of OCSAE exploded in 2021, with **unprecedented increases in reported cases** of grooming, child sexual abuse materials (CSAM), sextortion, and other abuse and exploitation.

Statistics from the past 3 years show that **CSAM of children in the 3-13 age category has increased from 76% in 2020 to 88% in 2022**.

Internet Watch Foundation, [Annual Report 2021](#)

Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSAE) is prevalent and on a steep upward trajectory



57%

of girls had at least one online sexual harm before 18

(Economist Impact and WeProtect Report 2022)



48%

of boys had at least one online sexual harm before 18

(Economist Impact and WeProtect Report 2022)



Children aged 7-10

1000%

worse off since COVID-19 lockdowns

INHOPE, Annual Report 2022



84%

of CSAM reports in 2022 were of never-before-seen material, depicting child victims of sexual abuse.

INHOPE, Annual Report 2022

“WHEN I WAS SEVEN, A MAN SENT ME PICTURES. I SHOWED THEM TO MY FATHER. HE SHARED IT ON FB AND ASKED WHAT TO DO. WE BLOCKED THE MAN AS WELL.”

A girl from Estonia, Focus group discussion, [Child Safety by Design](#)



OCSAE takes on various forms:

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE MATERIAL (CSAM)

CSAM visually depicts a child or a person appearing to be a child engaged in real or simulated sexually explicit conduct. This includes:

- Pictures & videos
- Digitally created materials
- Deepfakes
- Screenshots of live-streamed abuse

SELF-GENERATED CSAM

Children and adolescents under 18 may take compromising pictures or videos of themselves. While this conduct in itself is not necessarily illegal, there are risks that content can be circulated online or offline to harm children or be used as a basis to extort favours. Children may also be pressured or coerced to produce those images.



LIVE-STREAMED ABUSE

Live online child sexual abuse is instantaneously transmitted to the viewer, who can watch and engage while the abuse is occurring. Streaming leaves no trace on the device, unless the offender records it. Live-streaming CSAM is increasingly prevalent due to factors, such as the demand for new material and a customised experience.

ONLINE GROOMING

Online grooming is the online solicitation of children for sexual purposes. This involves the process of building a relationship with a child through the internet to facilitate sexual contact.



NON-CONSENSUAL SEXTING

Non-consensual sexting includes: sharing or receiving unwanted sexually explicit photos, videos, or messages by known or unknown persons trying to make contact, put pressure on, or groom the child. It can also be a form of sexual bullying, where a child is pressured to send a picture to a boyfriend/girlfriend/peer, who then distributes it without consent.

COMPUTER GENERATED CSAM

Computer-generated child sexual abuse material is the production, through digital media, of CSAM and other wholly or partly artificially (AI) or digitally created sexualised images of children. The realism of such images creates the illusion that children are involved, although this is not the case.



EXPOSURE TO HARMFUL CONTENT

Exposure to harmful content refers to children accessing or being exposed to, intentionally or incidentally, age-inappropriate sexual or violent content, or content otherwise considered harmful to their development.



SEXUAL EXTORTION OF CHILDREN

Sexual extortion is the blackmailing of a child with the help of self-generated images of that child in order to extort sexual favours, money, or other benefits from her/him under the threat of sharing the material beyond the consent of the depicted person.



“You could be manipulated later, even if you are very careful initially.”

A girl from Romania (Child Safety by Design)

ECPAT International, *Luxembourg Terminology Guidelines 2016*
 Suojellaan Lapsia, 'CSAM Users in the Dark Web' 2021

OCSAE occurs across different relationships:

OCSAE is not just perpetrated by unknown strangers online. OCSAE often occurs within contexts where the child already knows the perpetrator and/or has a relationship with them. This includes in familial settings, amongst peer relationships, and across other relationships relevant to a child's life. Peer-to-peer online sexual interactions are a frequent occurrence and an important part of sexual exploration, learning and expression. But these interactions can also generate risks, including OCSAE.



1 in 5

respondents of a survey reported experiencing a sexually explicit image of themselves being shared by a peer without consent.

Economist Impact and WeProtect 2022