

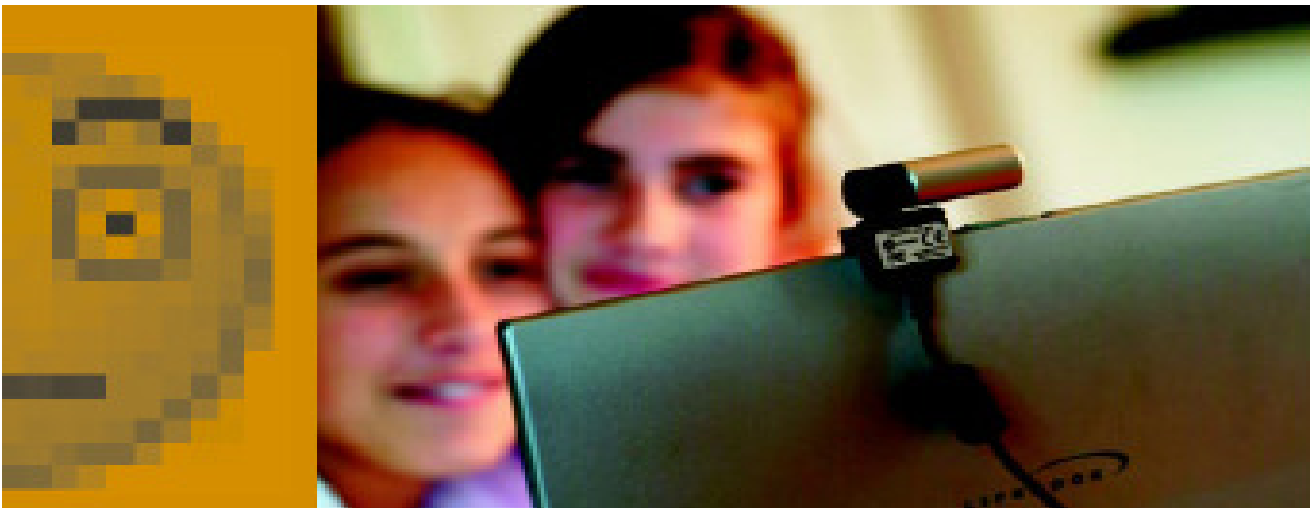


Save the Children
Norway

Public Consultation

Safer Internet and Online Technologies for Children

Save the Children Norway



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Introduction

Save the Children is a child rights organisation working on the basis of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. One of our main objectives is to ensure the protection of children from sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. In our response to the Public Consultation on Safer Internet and online technologies for Children we will focus on Internet-related sexual abuse of children and this particular threat to children's safety online as this is in line with Save the Children's mandate, experience and operative programme work. Save the Children Norway is one of 29 member organisations in the international Save the Children Alliance that works to protect children's rights in 130 countries all over the world. We have more than ten years of experience in fighting child abuse images online and is deeply concerned that child Internet users are exposed to intimidating and upsetting images.

Save the Children Norway sees four alarming challenges related to Internet-related sexual abuse of children:

1. The dissemination of child abuse images via electronic media is first and foremost a violation of the victim's right to protection from abuse and exploitation. It puts the child at risk of being contacted by potential perpetrators. The recorded images of abuse are a constant reminder of the abuse for victims, even when they have progressed into adulthood.
2. Child abuse images normalise the sexual abuse of children and can lower the threshold for non contact abusers to become contact abusers.
3. The Internet offers possibilities for creating the means to collect vast amounts of child abuse images. The new technologies offer a cheap, fast and safe exchange of illegal material for collectors.
4. The Internet acts as a meeting place for abusers that seek more information about available children, methods for abuse and new contacts. This puts all children at risk in a way that was not foreseen when the Internet became a household gadget. This is seldom taken into account in today's political priorities.

In addition, the technological revolution victimises children in new ways. Abuse can be viewed live online and the viewer can give interactive instructions directly to the abuser in another location/country on how the abuse of the child should take place. This can encourage further abuse and adds to the threat to the child's safety. There have been documented cases of this form of abuse occurring. Furthermore, abusers can get in touch with potential victims themselves online via social networking sites and chat to them before, during and after the abuse. This leaves the child unprotected and leaves no safe place from potential abusers.

The Internet offers children fantastic opportunities to communicate and to obtain information. However, children who use the Internet and mobile phones often engage in risk taking behaviour when online. This can leave them exposed to violent and other harmful content including various forms of sexual exploitation. Risk taking is part of child development and is of course part of adolescence. This behaviour can take the form of sexually explicit language, daring and inappropriate self presentations and uploading of inappropriate sexually explicit images of others.

This can put them at risk of being sexually abused, sexually harassed or open to ridicule if the images are circulated on the web. Teenagers do not tend to consider their initial risk taking behaviour and sometimes fail to see the long term consequences of their actions online.

When analysing the modus operandi of online abusers it is evident that these abusers are experts in making children feel comfortable enough to give away information about them selves. This leaves them unprotected and vulnerable to grooming by potential abusers. Perpetrators use the information from popular teenage web sites to gather information about who to contact, to build relations and to “groom” children into participating in sexual activities.

Actual cases of abuse show that the anonymity of electronic media is open to exploitation by potential perpetrators who are skilled in making contact with vulnerable children and especially young teenagers. If a perpetrator establishes contact with a child through a chat room, it can be difficult for the child to see through this person's manipulation techniques. The perpetrator will act as a friend and confidant in order to create confidence and trust while planning the process leading towards the abuse. This is called the “grooming-process”.

The difficulties of controlling such complex relations are enormous. Still, to protect children from abuse and empower them in using new technologies safely will give them even greater benefits from the technological development. Most children in EU countries are well aware of the technological aspects of being online and often more so than their parents and teachers. However, studies (e.g. from Save the Children Norway) show that they ignore what they have learnt about risk of harm when they feel they are in control. In other words, many children know how to protect themselves but do not use this knowledge.

Nevertheless, the problem is not new technologies as such - it is the cynical exploitation and abuse of children in a vulnerable position by manipulative and calculating abusers.

QUESTIONNAIRE I. Fighting Illegal Content

1.1 and 1.2. Forms of Illegal Material

Child abuse images are the visual recording of the sexual abuse of a child and they provide evidence of a crime being committed. Production, publication and distribution of these illegal images have serious consequences for the individual child, for children in general and is a societal problem which can generate a range of new crimes. The distribution of child sexual abuse images on the Internet can lower the threshold for committing sexual abuse, for prostitution and sexual offences by travelers and grooming children into illegal and risk taking behaviour.

The children who appear in such pictures are, at the time they are being taken, subject to degrading, abusive and humiliating acts of a criminal nature. In some of the images, they are beaten or burnt or are subjected to torturous sexual depravities. When made to pose in offensively sexual situations with others, including other children, they are subjected to psychologically distressing manipulation and abuse. No actual child abuse image ('pornographic' picture) of a child has been produced without the child suffering or being exploited. The abusive images are for the most part circulated via the Internet and other new technologies.

The right to be protected from sexual abuse and exploitation is fundamental in the sense that it largely determines the possibilities to fulfill other basic rights which determine positive child development. Identification of victims is of vital importance to prevent the continuation of what may still be ongoing abuse. Also, these children will be in need of therapeutic support to guide them through the trauma of being abused and having the abuse filmed.

Our utmost concern is the fact that children are being sexually abused, often in their local communities, and the images of the abuse are distributed world wide. This is a violation of the abused child's right to protection from abuse but also a violation of all children's rights not to be treated as sexual objects. Save the Children Norway also urges the EU to include other forms of sexual exploitation of children in their programmes, such as human trafficking, prostitution and recruitment to criminal activities.

1.3. Means to Fight Illegal Material

1.3.1. Prevention Strategies

To fight the production (including both the actual sexual abuse and the technological preparations for publication and distribution) of child abuse images we need to revise the awareness programmes and implement a new set of preventative strategies.

Most children today are technologically competent, often more than adults and teachers. Save the Children Norway is worried that many awareness campaigns focus on less serious threats to children in addition to being too focused on technological solutions, such as blocking, and know how. The focus of the prevention strategies must be on **prevention from abuse and grooming** without taking the joy and benefits of using new technologies away from children. We need to develop

differentiated messages to various target groups and in particular towards children. The message of prevention from abuse and harm must mainly be directed towards adults that have an obligation to protect children, whereas the focus towards children must be on empowerment and peer to peer communication on how to be safe and in control. Save the Children Norway would like to see protection from Internet-related sexual abuse integrated in existing crime and health prevention strategies.

Success in the preventative strategies in fighting the illegal content also relies on components such as swift police investigations, adequate legislative structures, treatment of abusers and empowerment of children in how to protect themselves from harm when using the new technologies. Save the Children Norway also underlines the need for early treatment of young abusers.

Stakeholders

- Governments
- Education authorities
- NGOs
- EU programmes such as Safer Internet
- National police units
- Youth workers and child welfare personnel

1.3.2. Legislation to Protect Children

Legal structures are important to protect children from having visible evidence of sexual abuse distributed on the Internet. Save the Children Norway is pleased with the new legislation in Norway. This legislation clearly states that **all** forms of images that document child sexual abuse as well as images which sexualises children under the age of 18 are illegal. The Norwegian legislation is media neutral which means that **all** forms of images in **all** communication arenas are covered by the law. In addition, the Norwegian legislation states that **all** forms of contact with the illegal material are forbidden. This means that for instance surfing on illegal websites is also prohibited.

Save the Children Norway would strongly recommend the EU to move towards similar standards for all EU Member States' legislation against illegal child abuse images. Such legal structures protects all children from being sexual objects, they reduce demand for abuse images which again will lead to fewer children being abused for the production of new images. In addition, a harmonised legislation in all EU countries will furthermore give the police a mandate to focus on crimes related to abuse images of children and cooperate across national borders. See **1.9.** for further comments.

1.3.3. Research and Knowledge

Save the Children has for many years urged for more research and understanding of the phenomenon of Internet-related sexual abuse of children. Society, professionals, parents/caregivers, law enforcement and authorities need better understanding of the trauma of abuse being published and distributed online, and the extent and the consequences of grooming and other forms of online exploitation.

There is very little academic research on the effect of child abuse images on society in general, on other children and on perpetrators. The Copine project at the University of Cork in Ireland is one of the few projects that has focused on the children from the images. A study from Save the Children Sweden in 2003 with interviews of children demonstrated that some children are worried that other children might see the images and feel pressured to participate in sexual relations with adults. Other children have said that the thought of someone downloading the images from the Internet feels like a repetition of the abuse.

There is also a need to do more research on perpetrators and the factors that contribute to the fact that some groups (such as Western European males) are more prevalent than other ethnic groups in relation to arrest and convictions for committing child sexual abuse offences, especially in relation to the new technologies. Young persons causing sexual harm to other children online is another serious problem that currently is not dealt with. The consequence of young people looking at abuse images of other children and the effect this might have on their behaviour has so far only been touched upon by researchers and child care professionals.

In addition, there already exists much literature and quite a few studies on how children use the Internet and other electronic media, but far less knowledge on how children put them selves at risk of harm and what consequences this harm can have on their development, health and behaviour.

Stakeholders

- EU programmes
- Governments
- Universities and colleges
- NGOs

1.3.4. Training of Child Care Professionals

It is important that child sexual abuse in relation to the new technologies is made **part of the curriculum and prioritised during the education** of key professionals in all EU countries. Universities, colleges and training institutes should integrate training in Internet-related sexual abuse of children in the education of social workers, psychologists, teachers, police officers and other professionals in contact with victims of sexual abuse.

Child welfare professionals must get access to post qualification courses on new developments in this area during practice. The technology and use of electronic media changes rapidly and new forms of exploitation of children develop even faster. All professionals in contact with children in general and victims in particular need to have **updated knowledge of the forms of victimisation** and the consequences of such abuse.

It is particularly important that social workers and other professionals who meet child victims are aware of the added trauma of the distribution of the images as well as of the grooming process which leaves the children themselves feeling guilty and shameful after the abuse. Cooperation between police and other child protection/care agencies is crucial to the work of identifying victims and the follow up care they need.

Stakeholders

- Governments
- Training colleges and universities

1.3.5. Child Participation

Save the Children would like to see all EU member countries implementing public education and prevention programmes **built on the active and qualitative participation of children** in developing preventative strategies. Children should act as ambassadors towards other children. The awareness raising must have as a goal to empower children and make them capable of enjoying the benefits of the technological revolution without putting themselves at risk. As part of this awareness raising it is imperative to direct programmes at parents and teachers. The focus in national prevention programmes must be on **protection from abuse** and not only on how to use the new technologies. Although, we would like to empower children while online, it should also be emphasised that children are never responsible for sexual abuse. It is solely the responsibility of the perpetrator. Adults and society have a duty to take the responsibility and protect children from sexual abuse.

National governments must implement strategies to raise **competence with professionals working with children** before and after the potential abuse. This training and awareness raising also needs to be more focused on protection from abuse, rather than on the technological aspects of the Internet. The abuse depicted in child abuse images is very often taking place locally and the abuser is in 80% of the cases someone close to the child. Nevertheless, all child care professionals must have a basic knowledge of children's activities online as this is a fundamental part of many children's daily lives. Moreover the distribution-factor adds to the trauma of the sexually abused child.

In addition, the EU programmes directed toward safer use of the Internet must also include the active and qualitative participation of children. The focus in EUs preventative strategies should be on **protection from harm** and not only protection from harmful and unwanted content.

1.3.6. All EEA Member States Must Join the Virtual Global Task Force

The Virtual Global Taskforce (VGT) is made up of law enforcement agencies from around the world working together to fight child abuse online. The aim of the VGT is to build an effective, international partnership of law enforcement agencies that helps to protect children from online child abuse. The VGT offers a central reporting mechanism where children can report any inappropriate or illegal activity with or towards children online. This might be a conversation with someone online who children think may be an adult, and is treating them in a way which makes them feel uncomfortable, or they think may be trying to meet a child for sex.

The VGT was created in 2003 as a direct response to lessons learned from investigations into on-line child abuse around the world. It is an international alliance of law enforcement agencies working together to make the Internet a safer place and is staffed by specialist police officers and investigators. The report will go straight to the police unit nearest to where the report comes from. The report

will go to experts who are specialists on the Internet and understand how easy it is to be tricked online and children's reports will be believed. A police officer/specialist investigator will then contact the person reporting. <http://www.virtualglobaltaskforce.com/>

Stakeholders

- Governments
- National police

1.3.7. Responsibility of ISPs

The EU must ensure that all Internet service providers (ISPs) within the European community implement blocking technology against abuse images. European ISPs must also implement the blocking technology when operating in foreign markets, even if this is not imposed by the national authorities. This technology prevents crime, protects children and prevents the growth of the business behind abuse images of children. It is important that this technology is not exploited as general censorship of unwanted content on the Internet, but is used to prevent the public from accessing material that presupposes sexual abuse of children.

Internet service providers (ISPs) should cooperate with countries that are now using the blocking technology to stop Internet users from accessing illegal sites related to child sexual abuse. It is underlined that this technology must be used **in cooperation with the police** and that only the technical aspects can be handled by the ISPs.

1.4. Civilian Hotlines: Not the Most Appropriate Way of Dealing with Illegal Content

Cases of sexual abuse are serious crimes towards children and should therefore be handled by the police. The police must have all information as fast as possible and it is important to bear in mind that also presumably legal images can provide evidence in order to find the crime scene and identify victims. Save the Children Norway started the world's first hotline following the Stockholm Congress in 1996. We have very positive experiences from transferring the hotline to the police in 2004. Our experience is that the Internet users have no problems in reporting to the police and that the understanding of the illegal nature of the material has increased in the public and in the media. Moreover, Save the Children's integrity is intact given that we no longer deal with material that we have argued should be forbidden to be in contact with. Our cooperation and information sharing with the police is constructive for both parties - we tend to team up with the police with a joint message from two separate perspectives. Save the Children Norway would recommend the EU to encourage similar transferrals of EU funded hotlines to law enforcement within the timeframe of the next Safer Internet Programme.

To handle images that document sexual abuse of children is, as Save the Children Norway sees it, not a task for civil society or ISPs. These are serious criminal offences towards children, often linked to trafficking in children and other forms of organised crimes. The system of civilian hotlines does

unfortunately not contribute to a better understanding of the child victims. Save the Children Norway finds that the hotline environment tends to treat child abuse images as a technological problem rather than as evidence of child sexual abuse. The task of the NGOs and the civil society in general is to make the authorities aware of the problem and advocate allocation of resources to the police. In most EU-countries today the police are seriously understaffed when it comes to dealing with Internet-related sexual abuse and the hotline system gives no incentive for the police to start prioritising these crimes towards children.

Save the Children Norway can see obvious benefits from civilian hotlines as part of a pilot project to collect information to present to the responsible authorities. In the pioneering phase in the late 1990s the hotlines played an important role in documenting a new phenomenon on the Internet and creating public awareness about the Internet as an arena for the distribution of illegal content. After more than ten years of experience from the fight against child abuse images there is an urgent need for political commitment, focus on victim identification and child protection, integration of Internet-related sexual abuse in general crime prevention programmes and a series of other measures, rather than keeping up a system which focuses on the distribution of images.

Stakeholders

- Supra-national organisations funding hotlines such as the EU
- ISPs
- NGOs
- Governments
- National police units

1.5. The Role of Organisations such as Save the Children

Organisations such as Save the Children have their strength in expertise on children and on active and meaningful child participation. Our contribution to the EUs Safer Internet Programme and indeed other instances working against Internet-related sexual abuse of children would in particular relate to information sharing, direct dialogue with children in general and victims of abuse in particular and our extensive network of professionals. We also see it as the role of a child rights organisation to keep the protection of children against abuse and exploitation high on the public agenda in order to curb demand, produce information material with a particular focus on the consequences for children, develop effective and targeted prevention campaigns, initiate and sometimes conduct research projects, advocate for the allocation of resources to the police and other political initiatives such as improved legal protection of children that will prevent Internet-related sexual abuse of children.

In order to succeed in these important objectives NGOs, such as Save the Children, need stable and predictable funding as well as support from and cooperation with international and national governments and organisations, law enforcement and child welfare professionals.

Stakeholders

- NGOs
- National and international governments
- Funding bodies

1.6. The Global Dimension

There is a need for increased attention on child protection issues related to the new technologies when it comes to the new EU-member states such as the former CIS-countries. Commercial websites containing child abuse images tend to be hosted in these countries and Save the Children's experience is that the production of abusive images are linked to trafficking and other forms of exploitation of children which often originates from this region. Save the Children would also underline the pressing need for a better dialogue with American authorities as a great number of websites with illegal content are also hosted in the US.

Western countries with a high percentage of Internet usage and technological expertise as well as a developed understanding of children's rights must share knowledge with police, governments, ISPs and child welfare personnel in countries where children are exploited, e.g by travelling sex offenders. As part of the knowledge sharing, Save the Children would like to see an export of the blocking technology used by the Danish, Norwegian and British police in cooperation with their respective national ISPs to countries in the EEA, as well as outside Europe.

Save the Children argues that to ensure that the EU supports and implements action to end sexual exploitation and abuse of children in relation to new technologies there is a need for a Council Directive further harmonising legislation in the area of police cooperation and resources, as well as judicial cooperation, including giving mandate and directions to the police with a focus on victim identification. There is a legal vacuum in the EU in relation to child victim identification. The EU must ensure that Member States' law enforcement agencies have clear mandates and appropriate resources to take ownership of child victim investigations at national and international level including cases where the geographical origin/location of the crime, perpetrator and /or victim cannot be determined.

Save the Children would also like to highlight the new Council of Europe Convention which includes several passages on the protection of children from sexual abuse, in particular related to Internet and online technologies. The EU must take advantage of this concerted European understanding of the matter and use it as an opportunity to develop a joint European policy on prevention of Internet-related sexual abuse.

Stakeholders

- The EU Commission
- The EU Member states
- Other national governments
- Law enforcement agencies
- Interpol
- Europol

1.7. Development of Efficient Technological Tools

To block images of child sexual abuse is in the interest of the abused child as well as a means to curb demand. This is a responsibility of national governments unless the ISPs themselves take initiatives in cooperation with the police to stop the traffic of abuse images. Commercial web sites displaying child abuse images earn from the number of hits on their site and the number of web users that will click further or even pay to see more. The repeated downloading of a picture increases the sense of abuse with the child – the abuse takes place over and over again with each download. In addition, the blocking technology stops people from committing a crime, given that child abuse images are prohibited in almost all countries in the world.

Save the Children underlines that although the development of new technological tools might be helpful and that a good and constructive dialogue with the ISPs and other branches is a prerequisite to succeed in fighting the distribution of illegal images, the most important measure at this stage is to generate the political will and commitment to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation.

Stakeholders

- ISPs
- Academic research institutions
- Governments

1.8. Analysis of Psychological Factors and Offenders' Use of the Internet

Save the Children suggests the following issues to be addressed in further studies related to the psychological factors and offenders' use of the Internet:

- How young people engage in risk taking behaviour and illegal activities when online
- The various forms of Internet exploitation and how they are linked together
- How young people are affected by exposure to abuse images of children
- Consequences of online abuse and life long publication/distribution
- Consequences meeting perpetrators/being groomed online
- Risk Profiles of vulnerable children.
- How offenders “read” and understand vulnerable children
- Prevention strategies and treatment of young sexual offenders

A significant element in these studies must be to include children's own experiences.

1.9. Harmonising Legal Provisions Across Member States

As argued in 1.3.2. legal structures are a prerequisite in the fight against child sexual abuse images. The EU must implement a common understanding of children's rights to protection from sexual abuse and exploitation in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and The Optional protocol on Child Pornography, Child Prostitution and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual purposes. Save the Children urges all EU Member countries to regard a child as a person under the age of 18 years, and protect all persons under 18 from all forms of sexual exploitation including online abuse, despite national variations in the age of consent.

In order to fight the distribution of illegal content, the legal framework in all EU member states and across the whole EEA must address the following chain of criminal and illegal behaviours that make up the production and distribution of images of sexual abuse of children:

- Children being abused for the production of material: Recruitment/grooming/close relations
- Perpetrator/abuser: committing a serious criminal offence toward the child(children
- Distributing the abuse/making the child available: Paedophile networks, exchange of child sexual abuse material (and/or real children)
- Producer of material: Technical production of films/photographs
- ISPs/website editors/ credit card companies: Making the content available on the Internet
- Adults/ potential abusers: Encouraging, grooming, threatening children to engage in sexual activities by using abusive images

QUESTIONNAIRE 2. FIGHTING HARMFUL CONTENT

Save the Children Norway's contribution to the consultation will focus on images of child sexual abuse and their harmful effect on children, on potential perpetrators and on society in general.

Save the Children Norway would like to highlight the fact that all images of children in a sexual context or depicting child sexual abuse represents a violation of ALL children's rights to protection from being a sexual object. When children are presented as sexual objects it lowers the threshold for sexual abuse of children and is harmful for children even though not all images of such content are defined as illegal.

2.1. Visible Evidence of Abuse Must be Prioritised

To fight harmful content beyond 2008 is of utmost importance. Harmful content such as images of violence and sexual abuse of children are visible evidence of serious crimes toward children. Firstly, it is important to identify, rescue and take care of the children who have been subjected to degrading and humiliating sexual abuse. Secondly, Save the Children finds it imperative to fight harmful content, in relation to the negative effects it has on the individual child abused, to all children and to society in general.

2.2. Means to Fight the Production and Distribution of Harmful Content

By fighting illegal material (see Questionnaire 1, point 1.3.) the result will automatically also be a reduction of harmful content, in particular related to harmful sexual presentations of children.

2.2.1. Harmonisation of Legislation

EU legislation must include *all* forms of sexual presentations of children and generate a clear understanding of the dangers and illegality of promoting the child as a sexual object. Harmful (but not always illegal under today's legislation) images can add to the trauma, both for victims of sexual abuse and for children who have been groomed to publish sexual images of them selves. Access to so called "erotic" images of children lowers offenders' inhibitions to committing sexual offences toward children. The images are often used as part of the grooming process to lure children into participating in sexual activities. Perpetrators also use images of the children in sexual poses to threaten children not to tell.

There is substantial scope to harmonise EU legislation in the area of police cooperation and resources, as well as judicial cooperation to ensure that all the aspects above are taken into account.

2.2.2. Awareness Campaigns

Save the Children recommends that the next EU programme on safer Internet contains awareness campaigns to curb demand for so called erotic images of children, both commercially produced images and those made by children and young people themselves. Governments at all levels need to work on strategies against children being presented as sexual objects, in particularly on the Internet.

Save the Children would also like to see that NGOs, schools, parents/caregivers and other stakeholders take more active part in protecting children from becoming part of the adult concept of pornography and sexualisation.

2.2.3. ISPs

To fight the distribution of harmful content the ISPs and producers/hosts of popular devices and websites used by children and young people need to be included in awareness raising campaigns. A more appropriate and comprehensive legislation throughout the EEA will give a clearer signal to the ISPs as to what is considered harmful to children and how to deal with it.

2.3. The Role of the Media

Media has a role to play in the awareness raising. Save the Children finds it useful to cooperate with the media, but media campaigns must be coordinated with other awareness programmes targeted at parents, Internet users and other stakeholders. NGOs and other pressure groups must know their ways around media to ensure that media coverage is part of the awareness raising message but does not contribute to scare the public away from new technologies. When using the media to communicate about harmful content, one must be aware who the target group is (parents, children, abusers, authorities etc). The media can be used rather successfully to highlight issues of concern (such as the lack of identified victims of Internet-related sexual abuse) and to put pressure on authorities to prioritise these issues.

However, any media campaign must seek to avoid sensationalism and journalists must be taught to treat victims with respect. Save the Children has the experience that the media tends to focus on the “paedophile” rather than on the actual harm to children and we feel that many actors in the media need more knowledge and information about the consequences of child sexual abuse related to the new technologies. To train journalists in constructive coverage of Internet-related harm to children would make up an interesting and useful element of a new Safer Internet Programme.

2.4. The Role of Education in relation to Harmful Content

Education has an important role to play in empowering children to deal appropriately with harmful content on the Internet. Focus should be on the harmful effects of children’s own risk taking and potential harmful behaviour online, not solely on exposure to unwanted content. However, exposure to harmful content can influence the attitudes and/or behaviour of Internet users, such as when viewers of child abuse images are encouraged by other users to commit abuse themselves.

It is also important to focus on harm related to new technologies separately from other forms of harm caused to children online. When it comes to grooming for instance, the contact is established online, whereas the meeting and the potential dangerous situation happens in real life. Good preventative strategies can only be developed based on meaningful and qualitative child participation. All aspects of protection from harm must be included in existing crime prevention programmes as well as developing new programmes based on updated knowledge on the new forms of harm and victimisation caused by the new technologies. Save the Children Norway urges all schools to use the

existing blocking technology to protect children from exposure to harmful and illegal content. At the same time, schools also have an important role to prevent children from producing harmful or illegal content themselves. See **3.3**.

Save the Children would like to stress that although education has a vital role, many children access the Internet from home or from their mobile phone/games console provided by their parents. Parents and other adults surrounding the children must therefore be targeted by awareness campaigns directed at protecting children from harm and harmful content.

2.5. Awareness Nodes

Save the Children underlines that it is important to focus on the most serious forms of harm caused to children by the new technologies. For example, prevention of sexual abuse/grooming will also prevent other lesser serious crimes, such as exchange of exploitative images. Awareness nodes in the years to come should also look at the link between online harm to children and other forms of exploitation which can also take place off-line, such as prostitution. Save the Children would like to see a stronger focus on vulnerable children who are not necessarily Internet users themselves. This could be children living in exotic travel destination being exploited by travellers from Europe who distribute images or contact information online. Regarding awareness raising, there is room for improvement in terms of developing differentiated messages for various target groups.

2.6. Subjects to be Addressed when Developing Efficient Technological Tools

Save the Children would like to see the Internet industry taking a greater responsibility for developing means that will protect children from harm. Age verification systems for children's activities online (such as chatting) would be one possible tool that will make Internet safer. The withdrawal or deleting of images and information children have distributed about them selves is today very difficult if not impossible. When this information is used by adults to get in touch with children or to blackmail them as part of the grooming process the situation can be very dangerous for the child involved. To look at technological solutions to protect children from causing harm to themselves and others by uncritically publishing images and information would therefore be greatly appreciated.

2.7. Research on Consequences of Harmful Content

When it comes to research on sociological issues and analysis of psychological effects of harmful content, Save the Children would like to see more studies on the following subjects:

- The move from (legal) "erotic images" of children, to abuse images of children and to becoming an abuser
- More knowledge on the exposure to abuse images of children, in particular teenagers at risk of committing abuse

QUESTIONNAIRE 3. USER-GENERATED CONTENT AND ONLINE COMMUNICATION

The Internet offers children fantastic opportunities for children to communicate and to express opinions and share information worldwide. In today's technological world, every child can be an editor. However, Save the Children Norway is concerned about the risk taking behaviour many young people engage in when online. When children publish personal information available for everyone, and when they communicate on various websites, children are in danger of being grooming. Violent, harmful and illegal content including different forms of sexual exploitation is often used as a part of the grooming process in order to manipulate children and lure them into generate and distribute sexual presentation of themselves. This may lead to sexual abuse if a child later meets the abuser face to face.

3.1. A Combination of Means Necessary to Protect Children from Sexual Harm

Save the Children Norway would like to stress the importance of a holistic approach to protect children from sexual abuse related to the new technologies. We suggest the following means:

3.1.1. Legal Framework/Structures

Legislation, such as the grooming law in the UK and the newly adopted bill in Norway, makes it illegal to contact and groom children with the intent of committing a sexual offence. A legal structure will strengthen the protection of victims of sexual abuse online and also strengthen other means in the fight against sexual abuse against children. Save the Children Norway would also like to point to the fact that today the rights of victims of sexual abuse in general are not protected. Sexual offences are in many countries not prioritised by law enforcement, the judicial system is not child-friendly and the knowledge of the consequences of sexual abuse is lacking.

Save the Children Norway recommends similar legislation in **all** EU Member States to send a clear signal to the public in general, to possible perpetrators and to children that this form of behaviour is illegal, harmful and not acceptable.

All EU member states must ensure that the rights of sexually abused children and victims of online grooming are better protected. That also goes for implementation of already existing legislation as well as international obligations such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional protocol.

3.1.2. Awareness: Empowerment of Children

There is an enormous need for information and knowledge about sexual abuse related to the new technologies. There is a enormous discrepancy between children's risk taking behaviour, especially when it comes to user generated activities on the Internet and what parents and other adults know about their behaviour. Also, children do not fully comprehend the fact the user generated information are available for anyone everywhere.

Among many adults there is also a lack of understanding when it comes to the risks young people meet online and especially what kind of risk-taking behaviour many children engage in when using the Internet or other electronic media, such as the mobile phone and game consoles. Many online meeting places highly sexualized in their language and image sharing. Examples of this are the Norwegian teenage websites www.deiligst.no, www.penest.no, www.hotnot.no, www.gaysir.no and www.eros.no .

Save the Children Norway has extensive experience working with child victims of sexual abuse, through which we have learnt that it is very difficult for children to talk about the sexual abuse they have been exposed to, and in particular if they have been groomed. As part of the grooming process the perpetrator tries to make the child feel responsible for and guilty about what has happened. In addition, many cases of sexual exploitation happens as part of children's own risk taking behaviour such as posting sexual images of themselves or getting in touch with adults that say they would like to meet up for sex. Even though children's user generated content may be illegal and potential harmful, children have the right to be protected from grooming and sexual abuse. This is a responsibility of adults and the society in the general. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a the definition of a *child* is a person under the age of 18. Save the Children Norway urges **all** EU Member States to respect and implement this definition.

In order to enable children to talk about these difficult issues and thereby to reduce the risks they are exposed to, children must feel certain that adults will listen and understand. Children must be able to report the abuse, be taken care of if they are harmed in any way and get protection from further abuse. It is also important for children to report abuse that It is imperative that the legal system and law enforcement take children's reports about abuse seriously and that they are treated as grave crimes against children. (http://www.ceop.gov.uk/children_and_young_people.asp).

3.3.3. Target Groups

The general public must be made more aware of the risks children are exposed to when they use new electronic media, and competence must be built in general to protect children and reduce risks. At the same time it is necessary to target vulnerable groups of children and young people. Save the Children Norway would like to point to groups of children with problems related to poverty, alcohol- and drug abuse, sexual abuse or violence in the family, little or no support from parents or other care takers, children with mental problems or disabilities. These groups (e.g. school drop outs) need to be targeted through carefully planned prevention strategies and information material as they are less likely to respond to general information campaigns about safe Internet use.

Other important target groups are:

- Parents and other care takers
- Child welfare professionals (e.g. health prevention workers)
- Law enforcement
- Education system
- Media (both a target group in itself and a channel for awareness raising)
- National governments

EU programmes, such as the Safer Internet Action Plan, directed at awareness raising and prevention of risk taking behaviour also have a vital role to play as they set the standard for the information strategies deployed by government agencies and NGOs all over Europe and reach out to a widespread audience.

1.3.4. Child Friendly Protection Systems

It is important that children report abuse they are exposed to or encounter on the Internet. Easily accessible reporting mechanisms must be made available. The Ceop centre in the UK has successfully deployed a reporting mechanism for children being groomed, harassed or otherwise harmed online. <http://www.ceop.gov.uk/>

Such reporting mechanisms presupposes resources in the police and child welfare services to deal with the reports that children make and that children's risk taking behaviour, although harmful or illegal, is not condemned. To deal with all aspects on user-generated harmful and illegal content and risk taking behaviour it is pivotal that child care and legal protection systems must obtain a broad understanding of sexual abuse on the Internet.

See paragraph 3.7. for more on the need for updated knowledge and research.

3.2. Further Risks and Dangerous Forms of Communication

When children use new technologies they are at risk of being contacted and recruited to criminal activities such as drug use and /or dealing, prostitution, trafficking of children and illegal employment. In a recent case from Norway a girl from Estonia was recruited through a chat room accessed from her local school library to trafficking in Trondheim. She thought she fell in love with a 16 year old boy and travelled to Norway as a 16 year old. She was kept prisoner in an apartment for a year forced to degrading and humiliating sexual abuse and prostitution. Her traffickers were sentenced to Norway's first Supreme Court sentence on trafficking in children.

Save the Children Norway would also like to point to the fact that many children bully other children when online. The threshold for being nasty and rude towards other children is much lower when using new technologies. Children themselves tell us that it is easier to bully when they do not have to face the victim physically. In addition, the distribution of the bullying adds to the trauma and pain of the bullied child.

3.3. The Role of Education in Relation to Online Sexual Abuse of Children

The educational system must assume greater responsibility for children's safety online, in particular when it comes to school related activities. Save the Children Norway would recommend **all** schools at all levels to implement blocking technology to protect children from exposure to illegal images of child sexual abuse. This is an important component of preventing children from engaging in illegal activities, like sexual exploitation, themselves. The education system must also implement policies at every institution regarding their own user-generated material. Examples from Norway show that schools themselves publish images and information that can be moved to other websites and

electronic devices, manipulated and/or morphed. In addition, schools publish information about the students that can be linked to the children's own user-generated content and lead to unwanted contact and grooming by adults.

The education system reaches all children and must be used as a channel for prevention strategies related to protection from online grooming and sexual abuse. Children must learn that all user-generated content can stay on the Internet forever and is available to everyone everywhere. Children's education must include focus on empowerment of children in protecting themselves from grooming and abuse while online.

Save the Children Norway would like to stress that the education system also has an obligation to protect children from sexual exploitation. Teachers and other adults in the education system must be aware of that children are often manipulated, tempted or groomed into illegal or unwanted behaviour online. The education system has a role when it comes to identifying children involved in illegal or harmful online behaviour as well as reporting to the police or other relevant instances if a child is at risk of harm.

When it comes to young persons with an aggressive sexual behaviour or sexual abusers, Save the Children Norway would like to emphasise the importance of knowledge and awareness among child welfare services. Early intervention, also by the school system, is essential to prevent further harm to other children as well as to the young abuser. This issue also needs to be addressed at the training colleges for all professions working with children, including victims and/or potential abusers.

3.4. Media should Take Responsibility

Media in general must take a responsibility for protecting children against online sexual abuse. This also includes not presenting children as sexual objects or encouraging children in risk taking behaviour in communities, web sites, chat rooms etc. run by media corporations. There must be more knowledge in the media about the consequences for individual victims of sexual abuse and for society in general when children are presented as sexual objects and sexual abuse is sensationalised.

Media is also a partner for organisations such as Save the Children when it comes to spreading awareness about Internet related sexual abuse. Such partnership must be developed through campaigns and "grooming" of media as a stakeholder.

3.5. Public Campaigns and National Nodes

Save the Children Norway supports the positive work done by the EU in raising public awareness of children's safety on the Internet. However, from 2008 Save the Children Norway would recommend a stronger focus on prevention from sexual abuse and grooming. Save the Children Norway would also like to see a clearer focus in the preventative strategies related to the children who are victims of all forms of online exploitation. Save the Children underlines that the strategies needed for prevention of harm, exploitation and production of illegal content are different from what means needed to raise awareness about safe Internet use in general.

Prevention of online sexual abuse must be linked to other prevention programmes against abuse and exploitation. Internet-related sexual abuse is not a technological problem, but serious crimes committed towards children both online and offline. The sexual abuse often takes place in the child's local environment and therefore the focus must be on prevention, identification and protection/care..

An excellent example is the preventative work and empowerment of children as Internet users done by Ceop in the UK. (http://www.ceop.gov.uk/children_and_young_people.asp).

3.6. Development of Efficient Technologies

Save the Children Norway is very positive to EU initiatives to develop new technologies in order to protect children when online. However, Save the Children Norway sees the development of new technologies as primarily a responsibility for the Internet Service Providers (ISPs) themselves. An example of good practice is the blocking technology developed by the Norwegian telecommunications company, Telenor in cooperation with the criminal police and with support from Save the Children. This technology is now applied to children's mobile phones as well in order to protect them from harmful and/or illegal content. ISPs in Europe must take a greater responsibility when it comes to technological solutions, such as age verification systems, that will make children safer when online. ISPs in all EU Member States must implement the blocking technology. There is currently a project in Europol focused on a wider implementation of the blocking technology which means there are good possibilities for information sharing and implementation of this successful tool.

Save the Children Norway would like to stress the importance of new technology in order to protect children, but at the same time underline that it is important with a holistic approach and deploy a variety of means to fight online sexual abuse of children.

3.7. The Need for Updated Knowledge

Save the Children Norway is concerned that there still is a lack of academic research on Internet-related sexual abuse against children. There is a need for further studies on the extent of Internet-related abuse, the consequences of such abuse and the link between the various forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. More research needs to be done on perpetrators use of child sexual abuse images (and/or adult pornography) as part of the grooming process, including the effects on children, how their vulnerability can be reduced.

We also need studies based on information from the child victims themselves related to how they have experienced the abuse and what consequences it has had on their life and further development. More knowledge is furthermore needed on what makes some children more vulnerable than others and what generates risk taking behaviour among some groups of children. How children themselves perceive risks and how they feel about harm they have been subjected to is important to be able to develop adequate preventative measures.

Updated knowledge and empirical data are essential in order to protect children against Internet-related sexual abuse. Successful awareness campaigns and other preventative measures directed toward children and adults presuppose updated knowledge, in particularly on risk taking behaviour.

More knowledge will also add to the successful identification and treatment of child victims in the child welfare system. Save the Children Norway would also like to emphasise the need for better understanding and more knowledge in law enforcement. Recent cases in Norway has shown that law enforcement do not see the destructive consequences of grooming and sexual abuse. On the contrary, part of law enforcement puts the responsibility for the abuse on the child and the child's own user generated content and risk taking behaviour.

3. 8. Harmonisation of Legislation against Grooming

Save the Children Norway has positive experience from the implementation of the grooming legislation in Norway. Save the Children Norway would like to stress that although children expose themselves to danger and potential exploitation they have a right to be protected from sexual abuse, also related to the Internet. Legislation against grooming in all EU countries would protect individual children from harmful grooming and would also give a clear signal that these crimes are not accepted in our society. See **3.1.** for more about legislative measures. The grooming legislation is an effective means to protect all children from exploitation and abuse but must be followed by other measures such as information campaigns, allocation of resources and competence to law enforcement as well as empowerment of children themselves.