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16 May 2025

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination

Minutes

of the joint hearing held in Strasbourg on 8 April 2025 on “Violent pornography”

The Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development and the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination held a joint hearing on “violent pornography”.

The Chairpersons, Ms Saskia Kluit (Netherlands, SOC), Chairperson of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, and Ms Catia Polidori (Italy, EPP/CD), Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, welcomed the following guest speakers: Ms Maree Crabbe, Director, It's Time We Talked, Australia (*online*) and Ms Ruth Breslin, Director, SERP – the Sexual Exploitation Research and Policy Institute, Ireland.

Ms Kluit explained that the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination was currently preparing a report on “Violent pornography” with Ms Laura Castel as rapporteur and the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development would give its opinion at a later stage with Mr Joe O'Reilly as rapporteur. She then introduced Ms Maree Crabbe, Director of It's Time We Talked, who had worked with young people since 1993, and developed programmes focusing on sexual violence prevention, sexual diversity, pornography and its impact on children and young people.

Ms Maree Crabbe, Director of It's Time We Talked, Australia (*online*)

Ms Crabbe acknowledged that pornography was a sensitive and complex issue, which was an integral part of children and young people's lives, often without adult guidance. She discussed four main points: the nature of contemporary pornography, children's exposure to it, its impacts on children, and potential solutions.

She explained that pornography was generally defined as sexually explicit content intended for sexual arousal, often showing nudity or sexual acts. This media genre had become enormously widespread. To understand young people's experiences, it was essential to focus on free, easily accessible online pornography, which was the most common form children encounter. **Ms Crabbe** highlighted a shift in pornography since the advent of the internet, with content becoming increasingly aggressive. Interviews with industry experts revealed a trend toward more violent material, which was consistent with the findings of academic research. Studies showed high levels of aggression in popular pornography, particularly towards women. For example, one study found that 54% of scenes featured gagging, 27% included choking, 75% showed spanking, and 48% involved verbal aggression. Importantly, aggression was overwhelmingly directed at women, with 97% of incidents targeting female performers. Furthermore, those aggressive acts were often met with positive or neutral responses from the victims, sending a misleading message to viewers that women enjoyed such non-consensual behaviour. She stressed the prevalence of non-consensual behaviour in pornography, noting that one content analysis found 35% of popular pornography included such actions. A UK study of over 131,000 titles from the most popular pornography websites found that one in eight described sexual violence, such as hidden camera rape or sex with someone who was asleep or drunk, with sex between family members being the most common form of violence. Another concerning trend in online pornography was sex with underage people, with the word “teen” being one of the most searched terms in pornography, and some content featuring young girls dressed in school uniforms or children's pyjamas, blurring the line with child sexual abuse material. Pornography repeatedly pushed the boundaries by depicting social taboos in an effort to keep viewers' attention. The distinction between mainstream pornography and child abuse material became increasingly difficult to make. Aggression and violence were so

¹ The minutes were approved and declassified by the Committee on Equality and Non Discrimination at its meeting on 12 May 2025 and by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development at its meeting on 16 May 2025.

common in mainstream pornography that efforts to distinguish “violent pornography” from “pornography” were of questionable utility.

Ms Crabbe emphasised that mainstream pornography - often violent - was widely available for free online, making it difficult to prevent children’s exposure. A recent UK study revealed that 10% of children had seen pornography by age 9, 25% by age 11, and half by age 13. While many young people actively sought out pornography, they were also unintentionally exposed to it, thereby avoiding it was often harder than encountering it. In terms of gender, young men were much more likely than young women to consume pornography, and to do so regularly. For example, a study in Australia found that more than half of boys and young men aged 15 to 20 reported using pornography at least weekly, with around one in six using it daily. In contrast, only 14% of girls and young women in the same age group reported weekly use, and only 1% reported daily use.

Ms Crabbe also discussed the impacts of pornography on young people, explaining that while sexual curiosity was a normal part of adolescence, pornography had become the primary form of sexuality education for many young people, surpassing real-life relationships. She described a disturbing model of sexuality and gender relations promoted by pornography, where aggressive sexual behaviours and practices – like slapping, strangulation and anal sex, including without consent communication and sometimes with active pressure and coercion – were perceived as normal, even though they were degrading or painful for most women in real life. That created social pressure, especially for young women, who might feel compelled to conform to those expectations even if they did not want such practices. **Ms Crabbe** pointed out that young men were less likely than young women to recognise the aggression in pornography or be concerned by its influence, particularly among regular users. She also mentioned LGBT pornography, noting that it often mirrored the same issues seen in heterosexual cisgender pornography, such as strangulation, incest, and childlike themes. She emphasised that pornography consumption was linked to violent attitudes and behaviours, particularly towards women, a finding supported by numerous studies, including meta-analyses. She also noted a recent increase in harmful sexual abuse among children and young people, with evidence suggesting that pornography played a role in this trend.

Finally, **Ms Crabbe** proposed four broad measures to help mitigate the negative effects of pornography on children and young people:

- Preventing, restricting or limiting their exposure to pornography (for example, through regulations, age assurance and safety by design);
- Encouraging and equipping them (and also the people who live – most importantly the parents - and work with children and young people to have conversations with them) to critically analyse what they see, starting with less explicit media like advertising and children's television, and later applying that critical thinking to pornography as they grow older;
- Supporting young people in developing the skills to resist pornography's influence, for example, by resisting peer pressure to watch pornography or pressure from intimate partners to mimic what they see in pornography;
- Inspiring young people to understand that relationships and sex can be much better than what they see in pornography, promoting a model of sexuality based on equality, respect, mutuality and consent.

Ms Crabbe added the need to support political and community leaders to understand the issues, and how to address them through policy and practice. A coordinated approach was needed with the input of multiple stakeholders (legislative and regulatory responses, education, resources based on best practice, communication tools and strategies and research). She concluded by stressing the importance of supporting children and young people in navigating the challenges posed by pornography, in order to prevent its harmful effects and help them develop a healthy understanding of sexuality and relationships.

Ms Polidori introduced Ms Ruth Breslin, who headed Ireland’s only research centre that worked specifically on sexual exploitation in its various forms.

Ms Ruth Breslin, Director, SERP – the Sexual Exploitation Research and Policy Institute, Ireland

Ms Breslin presented the main findings of a study published in 2024 in Ireland by her organisation. In contemporary pornography, what used to be niche contents a few decades ago, such as violent and non-consensual sex, had become mainstream and normalised. In addition, women at the receiving end of violence were presented as having a neutral reaction or even a positive one, as if violent practices were pleasurable. Child sexual abuse and image-based sexual abuse (often called revenge-porn) were also part of this issue, as women often reported that images of them were spread without their consent. In addition, consumption of pornography was increasingly normalised. Much of mainstream contemporary pornography was a depiction of sexual violence. Another problematic aspect of this issue was that while the main aim of

pornography is sexual arousal, young people were using it as a learning tool. The result was that pornography shaped sexual scripts, both for children and adults. Young people often came to pornography with no sexual experience, while girls said they went to it to understand what boys expected from them. Pornography was grooming boys who had no previous experience and leading them to commit sexual violence, and girls to submit to acts that they didn't wish, which they found painful and degrading. Research showed that those who consumed pornography regularly were more likely to perpetrate sexual violence. In addition to the negative impact of consumption, the impact of production of pornography needed to be taken into account. Content was not always simulated: on the contrary, often performers experienced all the sex acts portrayed in it. Eighty-three percent of women involved in pornography productions had experienced post-traumatic stress disorder, according to a recent Swedish study. Pornography was a multimillion-euro industry, which was drawing users in and trying to keep them engaged. To this end, content was constantly becoming more hardcore, to keep users interested. Another concerning aspect was the existence of pornography inspired by characters and shows that were popular among minors, such as Pokémon. To prevent and counter the potential harm of pornography, it was useful to discuss it, including in events like this hearing, to raise awareness of the harmful effect of pornographic content. The other main indication was to educate children, which meant teaching them how to be critical of the content to which they may be exposed. Censorship was not an option, and countering the harmful effect of violent pornography was not about opposing free expressions of sexuality. On the contrary, there was no contradiction between being sex-positive and have a critical eye on pornography.

Discussion

Ms Kluit thanked the experts and opened the floor for questions.

Ms Castel raised several questions about the violence depicted in pornography, particularly in relation to its financial and entertainment purposes. She asked what differentiated this type of pornography from a snuff movie. She emphasised that pornography had changed significantly since the Assembly Resolution 1835 (2011) on "violent and extreme pornography" and suggested the need for new measures, such as an article in the Convention of Istanbul to cover that type of violence. She also inquired about potential legal, technical, and educational recommendations to protect children's rights, particularly regarding the use of artificial intelligence. Additionally, she asked for clarification on the limits of freedom of expression in relation to violent content, questioning where to draw the line between acceptable freedom of expression and violence against women. She also sought clarity on whether the Convention of Istanbul allowed for tolerable violence for the sake of freedom of expression.

Ms Breslin agreed with Ms Castel that pornography often depicted real violence and emphasised the challenge of distinguishing "good" from harmful pornography. She acknowledged that some ethical or feminist pornography existed, but this was a niche that was hard to find, especially for young people. She pointed out that what was readily available in mainstream pornography was often violent, especially in the case of strangulation, a practice that had become increasingly common due to pornography consumption. She referenced academic research in the U.S. suggesting that strangulation had increased five-fold in regular sexual relationships over the last decade. She explained how women were talking about being strangled to the point of passing out, often without having consented to it. She stressed the need for updated legislation, like the recent non-fatal strangulation law in Ireland, to address this growing issue. She also argued that freedom of expression should not be prioritised over the harms that stemmed from violent pornography. In terms of technological solutions, she suggested that content could be filtered out to prevent it from entering homes, particularly those of children, and she supported age verification measures to prevent children's access to that content.

Ms Crabbe added that she had authored a guidance note on "Safeguarding children from the risks of accessing online pornographic content" for the Council of Europe, which provided detailed recommendations on actions to take across education, regulation, and other areas. She reiterated the concerns about strangulation and mentioned the "Breathless" campaign, which focused on the issue. She also acknowledged the complexity of the debate between freedom of expression and preventing gendered violence, suggesting that a more nuanced conversation was needed on this topic.

Ms Floridia highlighted the contrast between the widespread availability of violent pornography to children and the challenges some countries faced in improving sexuality education in schools. Some governments opposed or cut funding for sexuality education, quoting reasons like the belief that it was solely the family's responsibility. She asked if there were best practices or concrete proposals that parliamentarians could work on, seeking support and examples from countries with effective approaches.

Ms Maiorino asked the experts if they were aware of any effective legislation in any country that successfully prevented children from accessing pornography. She mentioned that Italy had tried to change the system, but it

remained ineffective. She also referenced Australia's potential law to ban children under 16 from using social media and inquired if this measure was or not related to preventing access to pornography.

Ms Vasileiou Chatziioannidou agreed that violent pornography not only reflected violence but could also teach, normalise, or glamorise it for the new generation. She raised a question about subscription-based platforms, like OnlyFans, where content was created by the victims themselves, noting a grey area regarding their legality and ethics. She inquired whether a different strategy was needed for such platforms compared to traditional pornographic websites.

Ms Crabbe responded by highlighting her co-authorship of a framework in the *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, which proposed an approach for addressing pornography in school settings. This framework drew on best practices in sexuality education, media literacy, and violence prevention. She emphasised the importance of comprehensive, age-appropriate relationships and sexuality education that directly addressed the influence of pornography to support critical thinking among children and young people. Regarding the second question, she noted that no democratic country had fully succeeded in preventing children's access to pornography, though some were making efforts. She mentioned Australia's trial of age assurance technology to prevent young people from accessing pornography and explained that while some legislative approaches had been ineffective, there was increasing pressure on the online industry to develop technologies for children's protection. She also referenced the UK's Online Safety Act and similar initiatives in other countries.

Ms Breslin agreed on the importance of taking responsibility for sexuality education, as failing to do so would leave the pornography industry to "sexually educate" children. She highlighted upcoming developments in the UK, where mandatory age verification for pornography platforms was set to be introduced in July, despite opposition from the pornography lobby. She expressed interest in how the process would unfold. Regarding social media, she noted that many children first encounter pornography through these platforms, not mainstream sites, and was curious to see the impact of Australia's move to limit social media access to those over 16. Lastly, she addressed the issue of content creators on pornography platforms, pointing out that while these platforms present user-generated content as organic, many are owned by traffickers and pimps. She emphasised the importance of not assuming consent just because a woman appears to be enjoying herself on screen, as many are coerced or forced into participating. She urged caution and raising awareness of the exploitation happening behind the scenes.

Ms Kluit thanked the experts for their very informative presentations and the participants. She then closed the hearing.

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development
Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable

List of presence / *Liste de présence*

(The names of members who took part in the meeting are in bold / *Les noms des membres ayant pris part à la réunion sont en caractères gras*)

Chairperson / *Président·e*:

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Ms / Mme Saskia Kluit | |
|------------------------------|--|

Vice-Chairpersons / *Vice-Président·e·s* :

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Ms / Mme Danuta Jazłowiecka | |
| Mr / M. Armen Gevorgyan | |
| Lord Don Touhig | |

| Members / Membres | Country / Pays | Alternates / Remplaçant·e·s |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Ms Jorida Tabaku | Albania / <i>Albanie</i> | Zz... |
| Mr Cerni Escalé | Andorra / <i>Andorre</i> | Mme Bernadeta Coma |
| Mr Armen Gevorgyan | Armenia / <i>Arménie</i> | Ms Hripsime Grigoryan |
| Mr Stefan Schennach | Austria / <i>Autriche</i> | Ms Doris Bures |
| Mr Andreas Minnich | Austria / <i>Autriche</i> | Ms Agnes Sirkka Prammer |
| Ms Anne Lambelin | Belgium / <i>Belgique</i> | Mr Andries Gryffroy |
| M. Benoît Lutgen | Belgium / <i>Belgique</i> | Mme Véronique Durenne |
| Ms Darijana Filipović | Bosnia and Herzegovina / <i>Bosnie-Herzégovine</i> | Mr Šemsudin Dedić |
| Ms Atidzhe Alieva-Veli | Bulgaria / <i>Bulgarie</i> | Zz... |
| Ms Petya Tsankova | Bulgaria / <i>Bulgarie</i> | Zz... |
| Ms Zdravka Bušić | Croatia / <i>Croatie</i> | Ms Rada Borić |
| Ms Christiana Erotokritou | Cyprus / <i>Chypre</i> | Mr Constantinos Efsthathiou |
| Ms Ivana Mádllová | Czechia / <i>Tchéquie</i> | Mr Aleš Juchelka |
| Ms Michaela Šebelová | Czechia / <i>Tchéquie</i> | Mr Ondřej Šimetka |
| Ms Camilla Fabricius | Denmark / <i>Danemark</i> | Ms Karin Liltorp |
| Ms Hanah Lahe | Estonia / <i>Estonie</i> | Zz... |
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| Mme Sophia Chikirou | France | Ms Sabrina Sebaihi |
| M. Alexandre Dufosset | France | Mme Liliana Tanguy |
| M. Alain Milon | France | M. Alain Cadec |
| Mme Maud Petit | France | M. Jean Laussucq |
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| Ms Heike Engelhardt | Germany / <i>Allemagne</i> | Ms Franziska Kersten |
| Mr Andrej Hunko | Germany / <i>Allemagne</i> | Ms Catarina Dos Santos-Wintz |
| Mr Christian Petry | Germany / <i>Allemagne</i> | Ms Martina Stamm-Fibich |
| Mr Harald Weyel | Germany / <i>Allemagne</i> | Ms Katrin Staffler |
| Ms Maria Syrengela | Greece / <i>Grèce</i> | Ms Maria-Nefeli Vasileiou Chatziioannidou |

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|---------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
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| Ms Mónika Bartos | Hungary / Hongrie | Mme Katalin Csöbör |
| Ms Mónika Dunai | Hungary / Hongrie | Ms Zita Gurmai |
| Mr Ragnar Þór Ingólfsson | Iceland / Islande | Ms Kolbrún Áslaugar Baldursdóttir |
| Mr Joseph O'Reilly | Ireland / Irlande | Mr Rónán Mullen |
| Ms Elena Bonetti | Italy / Italie | Mr Roberto Rosso |
| Ms Aurora Floridia | Italy / Italie | Mr Giuseppe De Cristofaro |
| Mr Alessandro Giglio Vigna | Italy / Italie | Mr Graziano Pizzimenti |
| Mr Stefano Maullu | Italy / Italie | Mr Francesco Zaffini |
| M. Andris Bērziņš | Latvia / Lettonie | Mr Edmunds Cepurītis |
| Mr Peter Frick | Liechtenstein | Ms Franziska Hoop |
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| Ms Gökçe Gökçen | Türkiye | Mr Namık Tan |
| Mr Berdan Öztürk | Türkiye | Ms Sevilay Celenk Özen |

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 Ms / *Mme* Femmy Bakker-De Jong, Netherlands / *Pays-Bas*
 Mr / M. Sabih Gazi Öztürk, Türkiye

Experts / Expert-es

Ms / *Mme* Maree Crabbe, Director, It's Time We Talked, Australia (*online*)
 Ms / *Mme* Ruth Breslin, Director, SERP – the Sexual Exploitation Research and Policy Institute, Ireland

Other persons present / Autres personnes présentes

Mr / M. Anthony Gony
 Ms / *Mme* Apolline Paillat, stagiaire RP France
 Ms / *Mme* Idil Igdir
 Ms / *Mme* Sandra Regol, MP France

Council of Europe staff / Secrétariat du Conseil de l'Europe

Ms / *Mme* Françoise Kempf, DGII

Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly / Secrétariat de l'Assemblée parlementaire

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development /
Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable

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