

“Beyond the horizon: a new era for the rights of the child”

*High-level Launching Conference for the new Strategy for the Rights
of the Child (2022-2027) co-organised by the Council of Europe and
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Deep dive conversation A:

Protecting children from online sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

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Context of the phenomenon

50 % of the world's population
is online

More than 30% of this
population is composed by
children and adolescents

Younger children are entering
the digital space at a faster
pace than ever

In the upcoming years, due to
technological processes, the
involvement of children in the
digital space will largely increase



The Metaverse

The upcoming wind of change in technological progress will bring a new urge in finding solutions to counter online child sexual abuse and exploitation

- ➡ Teens find themselves in the physiological transitional dimension of adolescence, characterized by rapid changes, in particular by the desire of self-assertion and determination.
- ➡ Building and maintaining connections and relationships with peers is one of the most important developmental tasks of the adolescence stage
- ➡ Studies show that online relationships can be sources of satisfaction and support

Despite the beneficial aspects of the digital environment on children and adolescents' development, the risks on the online environment, especially the Metaverse, are not to be underestimated

- ➡ In the upcoming scenario, not only the physical senses are affected by the new reality, but also psychological consequences should be taken into account.
- ➡ The self-identification of the child is highly impacted with the creation of an avatar, which the young person can radically change based on their preferences
- ➡ We must take into account that there would be major neurobiological changes in the aftermath of this technology
 - ➡ The behavioral, cognitive and social spheres can radically change in the new world, by leaving the child with a double life

The new risks of child sexual abuse and exploitation in the Metaverse

The unknown world of the Metaverse

- ➡ Children and young people do not know yet what is the Metaverse and how it is supposed to work and to be used
 - ➡ In particular, children and adolescent are sometimes not aware of the full risks and in such cases, do not have the tools or means to counter them
 - ➡ The new environment highly attracts children and adolescents for presenting new and innovative features, to which children are constantly used to

According to the Center for countering Digital Hate Research, in a VR Chat, every 7 minutes a molestation occurs

- ➡ One element to take into account, particularly in the Metaverse, could be the ease with which a child or teenager can be spotted and groomed in the Metaverse, via chat or headset, resulting in difficulty in being able to trace that action and report it
- ➡ The Metaverse possess an immersive interface and virtual interactions with other users, along with largely non uniform user safety policies across services, the technology represents a myriad of unknowns for families and young children
- ➡ Reality and fantasy are blurred to such a level that for a young adolescents it would be hard to discern the two worlds,

The consequences of what happens in the Metaverse is more than real, and affects extensively the children wellbeing

Solutions to be discussed to tackle online child sexual abuse and exploitation

Protecting children, also in the upcoming Metaverse, will need to go beyond warning labels, by considering also tackling the problem at its roots, education and awareness campaigns

