



**Virtual side-event organised by the Republic of Cyprus and the United Arab Emirates
in cooperation with
the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Violence against Children and the
Council of Europe**

ONLINE SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

**In the margins of UNGA 77 High Level Week, New York
Wednesday, 21 September 2022 8:00-9:30 (EDT) / 15:00-16:30 (EET)**

CONCEPT NOTE

The digital environment, constitutes an intricate and rapidly changing world that is reshaping children's lives in many ways, providing them with new opportunities but also exposing them to risks. The dramatic increase in online sexual exploitation and abuse of children is no longer a worrying trend, but a problem whose scale and complexity causes enormous individual and societal harm.

The evolution in the use of the internet and new technologies to commit online exploitation and abuse of children necessitates the sustained attention of States and all relevant stakeholders, in a manner that keeps up with constant advancements in technology. As the world has become interconnected, the digital environment has allowed perpetrators to use technological tools to spread and expand their harmful practices. This poses a great challenge for law enforcement, as new manifestations of online sexual exploitation and abuse of children are outpacing efforts to combat it.

There are gaps in legislative and policy implementation. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography as well as the Council of Europe's Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the "Lanzarote Convention")¹ are relevant and applicable.

This complex and multifaceted problem needs to be addressed in all its dimensions. Deep-rooted issues such as social, cultural, gender and institutional constructs, as well as migration flows, which foster the conditions under which sexual exploitation and abuse grows. Children in vulnerable situations, such as those living in conflict, poverty, or refugees, are more at risk of falling prey to

¹ In 2010, it was the first international instrument to explicitly criminalise the offence of online grooming, consisting in soliciting children online for sexual purpose (see, Article 23, [Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#))



predators, whether online or offline. Covid-19 has also been a contributing factor, in that it has exacerbated vulnerabilities across the globe.

The lack of effective mechanisms to bring perpetrators to justice and the transnational nature of the problem promotes impunity and increases demand. Robust child protection systems and effective cross-border cooperation are therefore essential in combatting this phenomenon, as is continuous education, prevention strategies and the development of innovative tools. It is imperative that the technology sector itself, becomes an integral part of efforts to combat online sexual exploitation and abuse, by ensuring that cutting-edge technological solutions are used by providers to detect harmful material online, in all countries and in cooperation with competent authorities.

Attention should also be given on the aspect of rehabilitation, recovery and reintegration of child victims and survivors.

This side-event aims to reflect on the trends, challenges and responses to online sexual exploitation and abuse of children. It will examine shortcomings to current frameworks, ways to address these, as well as new developments in efforts to combat the issue. In particular, it will look into the development of legal and policy frameworks and protection strategies to effectively prevent and eradicate new and emerging forms of online sexual exploitation and abuse in a child-, gender-responsive and child-friendly manner.

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