

# EU Youth Privacy Forum

Combating Child Sexual Abuse:  
A deep dive on prevention



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# High-level summary

In an educational and interactive session, the Youth Privacy Forum was able to learn from key experts and apply their insights in breakout group discussions. Some of the learnings were that we will not be able to combat CSA(M) by looking away, or by adopting quick technical or legal solutions that may have unintended consequences. Prevention of abuse requires a deep understanding of this heinous societal phenomenon, and awareness of the impact that measures will have on victims or on the behaviour of offenders. Participants agreed that such discussions between law enforcement, policy makers, civil society, experts, and tech platforms, are key in developing the right approach to preventing and tackling abuse.



# 01 Background

Meta launched its EU Youth Privacy Forum in June 2022, establishing a platform for discussion between industry, regulators, trades and NGOs, and filling a gap for engagement in the youth policy landscape. The forum attaches high value to bringing stakeholders from both the privacy and the safety community together, to bridge differences and work on constructive solutions. The forum is running as a series of regional and thematic workshops and events where attendees are invited to explore key challenges and exchange views on topical privacy policy issues regarding the protection of young people online.

The inaugural event saw diverse stakeholders with an interest in youth policy issues come together to lay the foundations of the event series. Underpinned by ‘the European year of youth’, attendees considered the current key policy challenges in the youth space and the ‘building blocks’ for age-appropriate design. Attendees also discussed the European Commission’s Regulation Proposal on preventing and combatting child sexual abuse (CSA) which was published in May 2022.

The second event in the series was held in October with attendees taking a closer look at the challenge of combatting CSA, and in particular exploring prevention. That event is the focus of this report. The forum was conducted under the Chatham House Rule and names have not been attributed to individual comments beyond Meta facilitators.

Future sessions will see a further diversification of stakeholders from other disciplines and policy areas invited in order to ensure balanced and representative discussions.







## 02 Introductory remarks

The second EU Youth Privacy Forum opened with a short video followed by a welcome and introduction from Meta. Thomas Van der Valk (EMEA Privacy Policy Manager) introduced himself as the moderator for the afternoon and warmly welcomed all attendees. Michela Palladino (EU Affairs Public Policy Manager) extended the welcome to acknowledge the diversity of attendees, recognising the benefits of having representatives from a multitude of sectors in the same room to discuss combatting CSA, prevention and the challenges and opportunities from both a safety and privacy perspective.

Meta's David Miles (EMEA Head of Safety) shared opening remarks with attendees. He mirrored Michela's sentiment; the importance of multi-stakeholder events and, on this topic in particular, to explore the intersection between safety policy and privacy policy, giving consideration to how to further the rights and protection of children.

David spoke about the remit of his role in safety policy. His work spans 120 countries, 14 of which have national online safety regulations in-train. David spoke about the sea of change in the online safety world - regulation is important for creating legal guard rails, however these can in turn wrap up a number of safety and privacy challenges. Focusing on the specific challenge of CSA and online safety, David felt that this was an opportunity for a united and more collaborative global approach. The European Commission's Regulation Proposal on preventing and combatting CSA is a great starting point for discussion.

David set the day's objective of bringing together multi-stakeholder perspectives to explore the problem of CSA, examine prevention opportunities and different approaches, and discuss some of the key challenges. David shared Meta's intention to utilise the day's discussions to further Meta's work in this area, and his hopes that others attending would do the same in their respective roles and organisations.



## 03 Expert presentations on CSA and prevention

Thomas moderated a panel that consisted of three experts who each shared a presentation on the topic of combatting CSA. The panellists provided insight into their own work on prevention before answering questions from the wider group. Between them, the panellists had a number of years experience across academia, social work, health and research, law enforcement, human rights and the European CSA hotlines. This gave the forum the unique opportunity to hear from individuals sharing a multi-disciplinary approach to the topic, greatly broadening understanding on the problem of CSA, the opportunities and challenges of combating it and an insight into prevention.





## Insights into CSA across Europe

The panellists each had first hand experience working directly with individuals from across Europe that had been victims of CSA or who had perpetrated. In their presentations, the panellists shared case studies to illustrate the issue and how the phenomenon of CSA has transformed over time.

The forum heard that CSAM is increasingly self-generated content, with children voluntarily capturing and sharing material online in one-to-one engagements, with the individual then going on to share the material online without the child's consent and/or knowledge. Content is also increasingly captured from live-stream sources, with 'Chatroulette' and 'Omegele' cited as examples of websites where children as young as 6 interact with strangers. Here, content is obtained during live video interactions, captured, and shared between perpetrators through other means.

Conversations with perpetrators have given insight into how and where CSAM is shared and tactics used by individuals to stay undetected. When interviewing offenders, the panellists shared that some perpetrators would openly communicate to children that they are an adult, often a number of years older than the child, and that those children would willingly continue speaking to them. Some of these children may be particularly vulnerable due to neglect in their day-to-day lives, seeking attention from an adult and willing to do what is required to build a relationship with someone that appears to care. Other children may engage in sharing content online with the promise of €5 to buy a game, or simply through curiosity or excitement of exploring their sexuality. Such vulnerabilities and child innocence puts them at risk of 'sextortion' and further abuse.



The experts' experience showed that many children were not aware, or had not considered, the consequences of sharing intimate images with others. For example, recognising that a one-to-one video call could be recorded and images quickly shared more widely, with such images hard to track down once shared. A question was put to the forum, 'If a child contacts the helpline and wants to know whether their image may have been shared, is it best to let ignorance be bliss? Or to tell them and provide support?'. An additional point was made that not all children who have been exposed to abuse will suffer trauma as a result - humans are incredibly resilient, and caution should be had when speaking with victims not to invalidate the abuse or suggest that they should be reacting differently.

The forum heard how some victims can repress memories of abuse or will have no memory of the incident(s) due to being too young to understand what was happening. However in some cases, even where the individual has no recollection of what happened, the impact of CSA can manifest itself in health conditions later in life and research has shown causal links between the two.

One panellist shared insight into the psychological sexual preference known as 'paedophilia', where a person feels sexually attracted to children and early adolescents. A proportion of the population have this sexual preference, with data from Germany indicating it amounts to approximately 1% of the male population. Paedophilia is a risk factor in many individuals that commit crimes against children, and indeed, those people that carry that risk factor are at higher risk of reoffending. Individuals can possess this preference but not go on to offend, however in not acting upon their desires, it can lead to personal suffering resulting in depression, anxiety and social isolation. In contrast, there are also perpetrators that are not believed to have the sexual preference, but go on to view CSAM through curiosity or through desensitisation to adult sexual content or pornography.

The panel highlighted that we often think of CSA as a matter of 'stranger danger', and that there is a common misconception that perpetrators are always men. In fact, research indicates 20% of perpetrators are women, 30% are teenagers and often the most severe cases of CSA are committed by relatives. Solutions need to recognise the challenges that this presents, for example there are often moral challenges - reporting offences can break up families.



## Prevention as a method for combatting CSA

Panellists stressed the importance of fully understanding a problem before devising a solution. Here, one panellist spoke about the need to question what it is that we are seeking to prevent in order to find an effective way of preventing it – ‘Is it an individual’s behaviour?’, ‘Is it the presence of CSAM online?’, ‘Is it online or offline where prevention needs to happen?’, ‘Should we be focusing on perpetrators or potential offenders, rather than investigating a crime against a child?’, ‘Are we trying to solve the problem of known CSAM, or new content?’.

The panellists highlighted how the overall phenomenon of CSA evolves as technology does, and how prevention needs to not only consider how CSA is committed today, but how it will manifest itself tomorrow. Offline prevention measures may assist here, looking at the source of the problem rather than the spread of CSAM. One panellist hypothesised that combatting CSA is like solving a Rubik’s cube. It would require the engagement of different blocks and layers, with different sectors at each layer, all moving together to support the end goal. Experts working in the field of CSAM are limited in number, and as a result discussions and research happen in silos. The sentiment shared in the opening remarks was mirrored by panellists, that events such as this are key to improving communication between sectors and opening up discussions – to share insights and different perspectives, all with the united aim of combatting CSA.

It was presented to the forum that sexuality is a taboo topic, and by ‘shying away’ from speaking openly about it in society we are driving children online to explore and learn from strangers. It was posed that sexuality is part of all of us from birth, and that we should be having open conversations with our children about sex to help educate them from an early age, and to normalise these conversations in families and with friends. This can help children identify when certain contact or behaviour might be harmful.



An example was shared of an 11 year-old girl who had been contacted online. She had confided in her classmate about the contact and the classmate had persuaded her that the incident should be reported. This highlighted the role that children's peers play, and the trust they place in one another. The panellists presented that society as a whole has a role to play to educate and support our children, and that this goes beyond the role of parents.

Following insights shared on the prevalence of paedophilia within society, the forum heard about one strand of prevention that has been successfully established in Germany. Through funded studies, the German government has backed a program of work which has been framed as both crime prevention and health care, integrating preventative treatment for those with paedophilic inclinations. Individuals are able to access therapists who can support them and help alleviate distress with the ultimate goal of preventing offending. It was shared that those with such inclinations will have been aware of them since puberty, however many will not feel able to speak up due to the stigma associated with it and potential implications for individuals in terms of employment opportunities and reputation.

In Germany, free in-person clinical and therapeutic treatment is available to all, including those that have previously offended, without financial cost and without an individual needing to reveal their identity. In other countries, national laws present a blocker to similar in-person schemes being implemented. This is because there are mandatory reporting rules which require therapists to report individuals. Perpetrator schemes have also been viewed as less popular by national governments who want to be seen to be investing in fighting crime, not spending money on criminals.





However, an online self-help diagnostics tool (which is already available in Germany) is being tested in countries such as India, which enables anonymous, confidential and free of charge support online which would enable individuals wishing to access help the option to do so, without fear of being identified and reported to authorities. Contact from individuals across 40 different countries demonstrates that there is a willingness (and demand) from individuals to get help.

Referencing the problem of CSA as a 'pandemic', there were calls for it to be treated like such. Panellists supported efforts to combat CSA that go beyond looking at the victim, and placing the burden only on them to protect themselves. It was felt that the scope of combatting CSA should be broadened from focusing on potential victims to include potential offenders, the environments or spaces that both exist in and providing greater support to both groups. There was an acknowledgement of the stigma and shame that can be felt by both victim and offender in asking for help, and this is not aided by national legislation that acts as a blocker to many. As society, we should be bold in regulating but also using online environments to meet and understand the needs of these vulnerable people - both victims and offenders. Technology companies have the opportunity to help direct or provide services or other interventions. There is an opportunity for partnerships and triangulation with government, private sector and social teams.



## 04 Understanding CSA / CSAM and prevention

Having gained insight from the panellist presentations, the forum split into smaller groups to explore the idea of prevention in greater detail, using three questions to guide discussions:

1. What is the overlap and difference between offline and online CSA /CSAM?
2. How do offender and victim perspectives play a role in prevention?
3. How is prevention different from detection in terms of safety and privacy?

A plenary discussion drew out the key points from each of the groups.

The forum discussed the semantics and why ‘abuse’ is used rather than ‘exploitation’. Exploitation indicates that there is a benefit, whilst abuse refers to the act itself and so is broader. It was agreed that greater focus is needed on prevention than detection; identifying opportunities to intervene with those that have the risk factor for offending and implementing tools within the spaces where they go to engage in CSA.

All acknowledged that CSA exists in cultures around the world and this was the case even before the internet. The response to CSA needs to be considered in light of the circumstances and whether it is online or offline will play some part in this. For example, has the CSAM initially come from consensually sharing images, or non-consensual image sharing? Where CSA is offline, the perpetrator may be known to the victim, but online it could be anyone, anywhere. A similarity in both offline and online abuse was the vulnerability of children – if a child is vulnerable offline, they are likely to also be vulnerable online.

It was agreed that it is crucial to listen to the perspectives of both children and offenders when developing solutions. Both can give valuable insights into behaviour, which is crucial with a phenomenon that is constantly evolving. Education plays an important part but should not be the sole focus. Equally education should not just focus on potential victims; more can be done to educate potential offenders, particularly about the support that exists.



One group presented a challenge that technology has made contact between children and adults easy, it actually facilitates it. This problem has been exacerbated by children having access to smartphones with cameras. It was acknowledged that online spaces can facilitate contact more easily than offline, however we must accept that our children have access to this space which was not created initially with children in mind. We as a society have a responsibility to support them and educate them, as do the platforms they are using. It was agreed that designing age appropriate spaces, with safety and privacy built in by design is one answer. The forum recognised the importance of teachable moments for young people, with suitable safeguards that recognise the developing needs of young people. Equally the benefits to young people in existing in mixed environments and engaging with adults. Society should empower young people and allow them agency as digital citizens.

The groups discussed the role of industry in creating healthy environments with intelligent choice architecture as part of innovating in prevention. This could be in adding 'friction' to certain actions or supplying additional information or support in order to get individuals to consciously consider their choices, for example a pop-up notification before sending a harmful message, or after entering certain search terms. Some groups had reservations about the effectiveness of such messages, giving the example that smokers will choose to smoke even after being warned of the harm. However this was met with evidence of effective use of similar tools which were trialled on certain platforms already. A further example was shared of prevention tools that use AI to identify potentially suspicious adults and prevent their accounts interacting with or finding those of under 18s. It is important to have more than one tool in the toolbox and put in place mitigations especially where something is harmful but not necessarily illegal.





## 05 Regulatory and industry approaches to prevention

Thomas was joined by three further panellists who gave presentations sharing insight into regulatory and industry approaches to prevention.

Both regulatory and industry approaches recognised that prevention forms one of three key pillars in effectively combating CSA and exploitation in all its forms. Prevention compliments and supports action by law enforcement and the judiciary, and helps to ensure that children do not become victims in the first place. There was an acknowledgement that more investment in research and resources for this is required to develop and set up effective prevention measures.

The panel discussed the EU regulatory framework for prevention work, including the proposed Regulation on CSAM and the 2011 Directive on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, which the Commission will review in 2023, and how those may help Member States' action. The proposed establishment of an EU Centre to prevent and combat CSA would play a role supporting the work and facilitating conversations between coordinating authorities for a more streamlined and effective approach.



Panellists shared the importance of evaluative work and sharing findings between key stakeholders to improve the overall approach being taken. This can come in the form of evaluating the effectiveness of current legislation and industry measures, assessing whether they are meeting the objectives they set out to achieve and improving transparency of such information. Another approach is to create a channel for sharing approaches that are successful. For example, the CSA Prevention Network which exists to help Member States put in place effective prevention measures and facilitate the exchange of best practices by directing them to relevant points of contact.

The forum heard about trends seen through CSA law enforcement which mirrored the experiences shared by the panellists in the first session, including the increasing amount of self-generated CSAM. Greater insight was given into the extent of the problem, with a panellist sharing the challenges seen in law enforcement given the volume of CSAM referrals far exceeding the capacity of law enforcement to respond in a timely and effective manner. The scale of the problem means that detection and review need to be supported by technological solutions to help review and analyse what is being reported. Learnings can be taken from technological insights, and used to develop specialist training for law enforcement and to innovate in prevention. Initiatives such as Project GRACE recognise the opportunity for AI and machine learning in improving capabilities and more effective law enforcement resourcing.

Panellists also highlighted the importance of engaging with perpetrators to distil learnings directly as part of developing prevention tools. Perpetrators talk to each other to exchange tips on how to conduct abuse, but this also extends to information and tips on channels they can use, and how to remain undetected. From conversations, law enforcement have been able to understand how perpetrators communicate with one another and also with victims.





A representative from industry shared how detection is the obvious approach for technology companies to focus on and that there are great examples of how this has been done across platforms. The forum heard statistics on the number of reports industry submit to law enforcement annually and how around 75% of these are a result of virality. At Meta, 6 similar images made up more than 50% of all reports in the months of October and November 2020. Platforms have demonstrated effective detection and the ability to use technology to identify and take action on CSAM before users see it, in some cases close to 99%.

However, the industry positioned that detection does not stop the harm and abuse and innovation is needed in the prevention space. There are concerns from industry about proposed regulations that do not sufficiently acknowledge or provide for a clear legal basis for prevention work, and further proposals that may jeopardise other rights and freedoms through mandatory scanning.

Industry shared examples of safeguards that have been effective at platform level including in-app safety messaging which has been used across 16 countries in the region and resulted in a marked impact in how users engage with images, even if their intention was not malicious but prompted by virality. Interventions such as pop-ups directing the user to a hotline can be extremely effective at prompting a user to think again about sharing an image. Hashing technology was also discussed which could offer a privacy preserving option for users, whilst allowing an image to be identified from within an online platform. Such technology could help support victims and give them a sense of control and power to take action.

The panellists concluded that there needs to be a spectrum of initiatives both regulatory and within industry and wider society, and that it is important that these initiatives recognise the role of prevention in effectively combating CSA.



## 06 Regulating for CSA prevention

The forum ended the day with a plenary discussion considering the approach to regulating for CSA prevention.

The forum positioned that it is not necessarily a lack of existing regulation, but a lack of enforcement that is the issue with the current position. One of the strands needed for greater enforcement is awareness of the problem and then primary and secondary prevention. It was discussed how easy it is to access CSAM and that testimony from adolescent patients is that people accessing this material have no fear as they see no enforcement being taken. When looking at offenders, they often separate themselves from the fact that there is a person behind the image - often they don't consider that it is abuse.

It was felt that there should be minimum standards for technology and a collective effort from small and big companies helping one another to guarantee that this minimum standard is met. We could look at metadata or new and innovative solutions which can enable privacy by design. But what this takes is sitting down with multi-stakeholder groups to explain how these tools work, how they can solve the issue whilst also being compliant with legislation such as GDPR.

The forum discussed as a collective the issue of offering individuals complete anonymity online. Could a solution be found in separating users into adult or under 18 platforms, or alternatively the use of user identification either directly to a provider or through a third party in order to create a level of accountability when present online? This suggestion led to a healthy debate around the complexity and tradeoffs. On the question of child-only spaces, it was agreed that there could be benefit to services tailored specifically to children however there will always be a risk that bad actors will make their way onto those platforms. Others challenged the suggestion of verifying users, suggesting scenarios where some people may wish to retain anonymity online alongside the known challenge that many individuals do not have access to identity documents.

The forum concluded that evaluation and strategic approach also plays an important step before implementing regulation but is often something that is neglected. There was a general consensus of the need to evaluate the legislative landscape, gain insights from research with children and offenders, consider current approaches at various levels (national, regional, global, industry and societal) and consider the findings alongside what it is we are seeking to solve.





## 07 Closing remarks

David brought the forum to a close with a brief summary of the day's discussions. He shared that it had been a privilege to have a wide cross section of stakeholders present in these important discussions. He felt that it had been a great opportunity to have a respectful discussion and compare ideas and insights. From his perspective, it was clear that all attendees have a deep commitment to keeping children safe. There were key threads where everyone agreed, including the importance of prevention of CSA(M). The need for a real understanding of the problem we are seeking to solve resonated particularly strongly and part of this involves investing in research and evaluation. David concluded that investment must be made in resources to deliver on enforcement of new regulation but equally important is the support for victims and offenders, or potential offenders. Platforms and industry have a role to play in this as do young people and former offenders themselves who can contribute key insights. There is a tension between privacy and safety but it is a healthy one.



## 08 Meta Quest 2 demo

An afternoon of insightful and lively discussion was followed by forum attendees engaging in a further opportunity to speak with one another during the post-event networking drinks. Meta Quest 2 devices were available for attendees to demo during the coffee break and networking drinks, with attendees experiencing virtual reality through 'First Steps', 'National Geographic', and 360 videos including 'Anne Frank's House'.



