



CONCEPT NOTE

Existing and Emerging Sexually Exploitative Practices against Children in the Digital Environment

A High-Level Side-Event to the 79th Session of
the United Nations General Assembly

11th October 2024, 10.00 – 12.00 EST

United Nations Headquarters, Conference Room 6, New York, U.S.

Background:

While the full scale of child sexual abuse and exploitation in the digital environment remains unknown, existing evidence suggests considerable cause for concern. According to the Childlight Global Child Safety Institute, there is one case of abuse reported every second, with more than 300 million child victims worldwide of non-consensual taking, sharing and exposure to sexual images and videos in the past year. Statistics provided by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) in the United States has stated that the number of reports of suspected child sexual exploitation has reached its highest number in 2023, with more than 36.2 million reports, including more than 104 million files of suspected child sexual abuse materials, arriving at NCMEC's CyberTipline. Again, it is important to underscore that these figures only capture the reported child sexual abuse materials in circulation, while the full scope and extent of the threat is unknown.

There has furthermore been a recent growth in the severity and complexity of child sexual abuse and exploitation in the digital environment, both in terms of scale and method, with the misuse of technological advancements playing a key role in this. Developments in Artificial intelligence (AI) have been at core of this, augmenting existing threats and even giving rise to new trends. The misuse of AI has significantly facilitated the amplification of child sexual abuse materials, but also driven the emergence of entirely new forms of large-scale abuse facilitated by technology such as grooming, sexual extortion of children and high-definition live-streaming of abuse. Generative AI, with its ability to manipulate the likeness of anyone, has also increased the number of child sexual abuse materials available in digital environment and lowered barriers for their creation and dissemination.

In order to deal with this new scale of child sexual abuse materials, investigators in the law enforcement community with burgeoning caseloads and growing backlogs are increasingly turning to AI to help them turn the tide in the fight to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation. Notwithstanding this, AI equally presents a plethora of challenges from not only a technical perspective, but also from a legal, ethical and societal perspective, that must be addressed before the potential of the technology can be realized.

Therefore, in 2020, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), through its Centre for AI and Robotics, and the Ministry of Interior of the UAE launched the *AI for Safer Children* initiative with the aim of tackling child sexual exploitation and abuse through AI and related technologies. To do so, UNICRI and the UAE Ministry of Interior developed a unique, centralised platform containing information on over 90 AI tools designed to combat child sexual exploitation, as well as guidance on how to implement these tools responsibly, a contact section to facilitate cross-border collaboration, and specialized trainings. Ultimately, the *AI for Safer Children* initiative aims to contribute to realizing Target 2 of Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which envisages an end to abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children.

In 2024, the Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children presented a thematic report to the 79th session of the General Assembly on existing and emerging threats that technologies pose to children in facilitating, heightening and committing various manifestations of sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse against children, with a view towards providing concrete recommendations in line with international standards that would contribute to responding to this problem.

About the event:

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), the Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, will host a side-event on the margins of the upcoming 79th United Nations General Assembly. This event will focus on new and emerging risks to children in the digital environment and the role artificial intelligence plays in both exacerbating these risks as well as facilitating the investigation of sexually exploitative practices against children.

Objectives:

The event will seek to provide an overview of recent trends and developments in sexually exploitative practices against children in the digital environment, spotlight the key challenges posed by AI and related technologies, as well as its positive potential to combat the trends of child sexual abuse and exploitation. The event will also serve to formally introduce the report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children on "Existing and Emerging Sexually Exploitative Practices against Children in the Digital Environment". Key findings and recommendations from this report will be highlighted, and complemented with a multi-stakeholder panel discussion on better understanding the impact of technological advancements on child protection in the digital space.

Preliminary Agenda:

11 October 2024	
10:00 – 10:15	Opening Remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ambassador Hedda Samson, Deputy Head of Delegation, Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations- Ms. Gabriela González, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the United Nations- Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the UN
10:15 – 10:35	Presentation of the Report on Existing and Emerging Sexually Exploitative Practices against Children in the Digital Environment , Ms. Mama Fatima Singhateh, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Sale, Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse of Children
10:35 – 10:55	National practices on safeguarding children in the digital environment , Lt. Col. Dana Humaid Al Marzooqi, Director General, International Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Interior of the UAE
10:55 – 11:15	Leveraging AI in investigations: the AI for Safer Children initiative , Mr. Irakli Beridze, Head of Centre, UNICRI Centre for AI and Robotics
11:15 – 11:45	Better Understanding Trends in AI Innovation and Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Digital Environment: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mr. Michael Prado, Deputy Assistant Director, Cyber Crimes Centre, United States Department of Homeland Security- Ms. Meg Gardinier, Secretary General, Childfund Alliance- Ms. Yalda Aoukar, Co-Founder and Managing Partner of Bracket Capital, and the President of Bracket Foundation- Ms. Vicky Charisi, Berkman Klein Centre, Harvard University
11:45 – 11:55	Questions and Comments , moderated by Mr. Irakli Beridze, Head of Centre, UNICRI Centre for AI and Robotics
11:55 – 12:00	Closing Remarks , Ms. Mama Fatima Singhateh, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Sale, Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse of Children
Close of Side-Event	

Logistics

The Side-Event will take place in person in New York and will be conducted in English.

Prior registration is required and can be completed [here](#).

For any questions regarding this event, kindly contact Mr. Odhran McCarthy, UNICRI New York Liaison Officer (odhran.mccarthy@un.org) and the secretariat of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children (hrc-sr-saleofchildren@un.org).