



bE— aware bE— aware bE— aware

BOOKLET

**STOP
OSEA***

*Online Sexual
Exploitation
and Abuse

INDEX

1. Introduction	5
1.1 Overview	5
1.2 Online Sexual Abuse & Exploitation: Definitions, EU Legal Framework and Key Statistics	6
<i>Definition and statistics</i>	6
<i>International and European Legal Frameworks</i>	8
<i>Council of Europe</i>	8
<i>European Union</i>	9
<i>Links between online grooming and missing youth</i>	10
1.3 State of the Art	11
<i>France/Martinique</i>	11
<i>Greece</i>	13
<i>Italy</i>	16
<i>Portugal</i>	18
<i>Cyprus</i>	20
<i>Belgium</i>	22
2. Identification of OSEA	26
2.1. Risk and vulnerability factors	26
2.2. Methods and platforms used by perpetrators	28
<i>Methods</i>	29

<i>Platforms</i>	29
2.3. Recognizing the signs of OSEA	30
<i>Grooming</i>	30
<i>Love Bombing</i>	31
<i>Sexual Extortion</i>	31
<i>Cyberstalking</i>	32
2.4. Case studies among Europe	33
<i>France/Martinique</i>	33
<i>Greece</i>	38
<i>Italy</i>	41
<i>Portugal</i>	43
<i>Cyprus</i>	45
<i>Belgium</i>	48
3. Prevention of OSEA	51
3.1. Cybersecurity and making safe online choices	51
3.2. The role of Comprehensive Sexuality Education	55
4. Supporting child victims of OSEA	57
4.1. The psychological sphere of OSEA	57
4.2. Getting support	59
<i>France/Martinique</i>	59
<i>Greece</i>	62

Italy 66

Portugal 68

Cyprus 71

Belgium 75

Bibliography 84

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

This booklet is part of the Be-Aware Toolkit. It has been developed with the aim to provide youth operators with a better understanding of why and how online **sexual exploitation and abuse (OSEA) is so relevant, specifically among teenagers (13-19 years old) and young adults (20-25)**. This booklet will give a wider picture of what online sexual abuse means, and how related it is to any other form of sexual abuse and exploitation. The preponderance of internet and technology in our society makes it impossible to avoid the topic and crucial to address it in the most aware way possible. In this booklet, you will find statistics and legal insights on the matter, both on a general and national level.

Online platforms are now a significant part of our reality and yet they can be dangerous if handled without the right precautions. **Technology** is now **accessible** to the **youngest** too, putting them at **risk** for unwanted attention and **dangerous situations**. In fact, more than 60% of children surf the internet every day and approximately the same percentage has a social media profile (Ali et. al, 2021). Therefore, the easy and fast access to the internet makes children a vulnerable and easy target on one part and helps offenders stay anonymous on the other (Ali et. al, 2021). In fact, research has shown a worrisome increase in minors being victims of sexual requests and interactions with adults (de Santisteban & Gámez-Guadix, 2017). As a result, these victims develop several trauma symptoms, such as PTSD, depression and other disorders, compromising their growth as human and social beings (Ali et. al, 2021, de Santisteban & Gámez-Guadix, 2017, Patterson et. al, 2022).

The present document is divided into 4 major sections:

1. Overview - will explain OSEA and exploitation, provide a legal framework and statistics both on the EU region and the partners' countries.
2. Identification of OSEA - this section will display the main risk and vulnerability factors associated with the victims, the dynamics adopted by perpetrators and the signs of OSEA. This part will also present some case studies from the partners' countries to give examples.
3. Prevention of OSEA – will be dedicated to cybersecurity and Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) as two main elements to prevent OSEA.
4. Supporting children's victims of OSEA – after explaining the psychological sphere of OSEA, a rich list of resources, tools, and initiatives from partners' countries is presented.

The Booklet is developed in the framework of the Be-Aware project (n. 2023-2-FR02-KA220-YOU-000182988) with the aim of raising awareness amongst young people. The goal is to

understand and prevent OSEA through a multi-sector approach, where legal, psychological, physical and social implications are embedded. Creating educational and informative materials is one of the main objectives of the project, which is why this Booklet is one of its core components. Research has shown that education and awareness are the key elements to prevent sexual online abuse (Patterson et. al, 2022). Moreover, the final target is not only youth, but professionals who operate with the young victims of OSEA too. In fact, operators represent a bridge between projects like this and their target population. The significant increase of Internet usage, the consequent presence of child images, the anonymity behind which offenders hide and the growing risks children and adolescents undergo call for action from all the people involved. However, despite the significant danger, it is yet impossible to deny and prohibit internet access to young people. It is, nonetheless, crucial and possible to educate them about its risks and extension and to give them a good sexual education. It is fundamental for a human being to grow and understand sexuality in a healthy and right-paced way in order to develop their own personality, identity and sociality while also recognizing and avoiding danger. In fact, the World Health Organization and UNESCO have emphasised the significance of giving youth the information and abilities they need to make responsible decisions in their lives, especially in an environment where they are more likely to encounter sexually explicit content online and in other media. (UNESCO, 2018).

1.2 Online Sexual Abuse & Exploitation: Definitions, EU Legal Framework and Key Statistics

Definition and statistics

Online sexual exploitation and abuse (OSEA) on children, also known as OCSEA, is a global issue and a particularly serious crime, threatening children's safety and well-being with long-lasting consequences for victims (Nektova & Mustafa, 2021). Recognized as a global emergency by the United Nation in 2022, OCSEA requires a coordinated international response. Both the European Commission and Europol have expressed deep concerns about its rapid growth, underscoring the urgent need for preventive and educational initiatives across Europe (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2023).

OCSEA involves the use of information and communication technology to sexually abuse and/or sexually exploit children (Interagency Working Group, 2016, pp. 23-28). Child sexual exploitation encompasses sexual abuse and other sexualized acts involving children, often linked to an exchange of benefits, such as affection, food, drugs, or shelter (UNODC, 2020). Perpetrators exploit a child's vulnerability, trust, or power dynamics for sexual gain or financial benefit (Interagency Working Group, 2016, p. 25). The distinction between child sexual abuse and

exploitation is often blurred due to their significant overlap (ibidem).

In 2023, the US National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) received over 36.2 million reports of suspected OCSEA (NCMEC, 2022). The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) identified 275,652 URLs with child sexual abuse imagery, an 8% increase from 2022 (Internet Watch Foundation, 2023). In recent years, reports of OCSEA in the EU have surged dramatically, with Europe (including Russia and Turkey) now hosting 64% of the world's reported child sexual abuse material (ibidem).



Source: Internet Watch Foundation Annual Report 2023 (Internet Watch Foundation, 2023).

In 2024, the European Commission stressed the magnitude of the issue, noting a significant rise in reports related to the EU, such as images shared and victims identified (European Commission, 2024). Reports of OCSEA rose from 17,500 in 2010 to over 1 million in 2020. Grooming cases also saw a dramatic 98% increase in 2020 compared to the previous year, rising from 19,147 in 2019 to 37,872 in 2020 (ibidem). This surge is likely linked to the pandemic, during which both children and offenders spent significantly more time online (O'Donnell, 2021). The reports that service providers submitted in 2020 in relation to cases in the EU included 3.7 million images and videos of known CSAM, 528,000 images and videos of new CSAM, and over 1,400 grooming cases in the EU (European Commission, 2024).

Additionally, a 2023 study by the WeProtect Global Alliance exploring the experiences of 18- to 20-year-olds who had regular access to the internet as children revealed that the prevalence of online sexual harm against children in Europe is alarmingly high, with 68% of respondents reporting they had experienced such harm before turning 18. The same study indicates that girls and respondents who self-identified as an ethnic or

racial minority, LGBTQIA+, transgender or non-binary were more likely to have experienced these online sexual harms during childhood (We Protect Global Alliance, 2023, pp. 3-4).



Source: WeProtect Global Alliance, estimates of childhood exposure to online sexual harms and their risk factors: a study of childhood experiences of 18-year-olds in four European Countries (We Protect Global Alliance, 2023, p. 4).

It is however important to note that measuring the scale of OCSEA is a difficult task and that the statistics available must be considered with caution (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2015, p. 12). The true extent of the crime is difficult to gauge, as many cases go unreported or unprosecuted, with victims often delaying disclosure for years (McVarish et. al, n.d., p. 3).~

International and European Legal Frameworks

International conventions like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (United Nations, 1989) and the Optional Protocol (2000) mandate protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (OHCHR, 2000). Despite these legal frameworks, OCSEA remains a serious crime, with definitions varying across legal systems.

Council of Europe

The Lanzarote Convention, formally known as the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Council of Europe, 2000), is the first regional treaty addressing child protection from sexual violence, particularly in the context of technological developments (Nektova & Mustafa, 2021).

Effective since July 2010, the Convention aims to eliminate sexual exploitation and abuse of children. This comprehensive instrument sets out applicable standards to State Parties to prevent child sexual exploitation and abuse, including where facilitated by ICTs, protect victims, prosecute perpetrators and promote national and international cooperation to strengthen these actions (Council of Europe, 2023). Chapter VI of the Convention outlines offenses such as sexual abuse (Article 18), child prostitution (Article 19), child pornography (Article 20), participation in pornographic performances (Article 21), corruption of children (Article 22), and solicitation of children for sexual purposes (Article 23) (Council of Europe, 2010).

European Union

Article 24 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights affirms children's right to protection and care for their well-being (European Union, 2012). To enforce this, the EU has implemented several laws and policies to safeguard children from sexual exploitation and abuse.

The primary legal instrument in place is Directive 2011/93/EU (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2010), which establishes minimum standards for defining and penalizing crimes related to child sexual abuse, exploitation, and abuse material (online and offline). It covers sexual abuse (Article 3), sexual exploitation (Article 4), child pornography (Article 5), and solicitation for sexual purposes (Article 6). The Directive also outlines measures for crime prevention, investigation, prosecution, and victim support. Adopted a year later, Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2012) enhances the existing legal framework by emphasising a child-sensitive approach, ensuring that the best interests of the child are prioritised.

In July 2020, the EU introduced its strategy for a More Effective Fight Against Child Sexual Abuse (European Commission, 2020), focusing on tackling both online and offline risks through strengthened prevention, investigation, and victim support measures. The strategy highlights the growing threat of child sexual abuse and includes plans for new legislation targeting grooming and child exploitation, while also calling for active collaboration from industry players in protecting children. As a result, several legislative initiatives were put forward, such as the 2020 temporary exemption from the ePrivacy Regulation (which became the interim CSAM

Regulation in July 2021), a May 2022 proposal for permanent rules on detecting and reporting online child sexual abuse material (CSAM), and the 2022 Digital Services Act (DSA), which specifies the obligations of service providers in managing illegal content.

Also in 2022, the European Commission adopted a new European Strategy for a better internet for kids, the BIK+ strategy (European Commission, 2022). The European Commission acknowledged the importance of voluntary reporting by online service providers to address crimes involving children.

In February 2024, the European Commission proposed updates to Directive 2011/93/EU to address new technological developments in child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA). Changes include replacing "child pornography" with "child sexual abuse material" (CSAM), criminalizing the possession of paedophile manuals and AI-generated CSAM, and expanding protections to all children under 18. The updated law will also address newer communication technologies like augmented reality and chatbots.

Links between online grooming and missing youth

Research examining the possible connection between grooming and going missing is severely lacking. However, there are strong indications that a child's risk of CSAE increases while missing and practitioners acknowledge the link between children who go missing and the prevalence of CSAE. However, the limited research conducted has primarily been at a national level (mainly in the UK and US) (Hughes & Thomas, 2016) and focused on in-person CSEA following a disappearance rather than online grooming preceding the incident (Greene & Alys, 2018).

A case of a child being groomed or going missing exposes them to adverse and potentially traumatic experiences, yet it can also serve as an indicator of underlying factors associated with such cases and offer insights into potential risk factors. For this reason, the CESAGRAM project study (CESAGRAM) approached the issue of OCSEA, particularly in groomed and missing children, through the lens of individual cases and direct survivor accounts of their 'tech-facilitated' grooming experiences and disappearances. The CESAGRAM Survivor Report has identified three distinct categories of 'missing' cases (Missing Children Europe, 2023).

The first category, groomer-initiated, involves cases where the groomer requests an in-person meeting, making up 40% of cases. These disappearances can last from a day to several months, with children running away multiple times. The second, grooming-consequence, occurs when children flee due to blackmail or after their parents discover grooming incidents, fearing negative reactions. The third, familial challenges, involves children who run away before being groomed, making them more vulnerable to exploitation, often linked to negative home environments or parents failing to report them missing (Missing Children Europe, 2023, p. 10).

1.3 State of the Art

France/Martinique

In France, according to the annual cybercrime report 2024 278,770 digital crimes were recorded in 2023 by the police and gendarmerie (Ministère de l'Intérieur et des Outre-mer, 2024). Digital crimes can take the form of attacks on individuals, fraud, attacks on information systems, illicit services, or even attacks on institutions, etc. Overall, over the past 5 years, from 2019 to 2023, a 40% increase in digital offences has been observed, with an annual average of 8%. Of these cases, 34.5% involve offences against individuals (harassment, insults, threats, discrimination, offences against minors, etc.). Women aged 18 to 44 accounted for 50% of the victims of digital offences against individuals in 2023, even though this category represented only 16% of the French population. Although they accounted for only 9,710 offences, a significant increase in digital offences against minors was noted in 2023. Over the past 5 years, these offences have increased by 45%, with an average annual increase of 13%.

In 2023, out of 14,934 reported URLs, 7,867 were deemed illegal, the majority of which (6,542) contained sexual content involving minors, 80% of whom were girls (Point de Contact, 2024).

Finally, according to the report by the Ministry of the Interior titled [“Les violences sexuelles hors cadre familial enregistrées par les services de sécurité en 2023”](#) (Ministère de l'Intérieur, 2024), nearly 84,000 victims of sexual violence were recorded during the year. In 73% of cases, these involved physical sexual violence (rape, sexual assault, sexual molestation), 7% were non-physical offenses (sexual harassment, voyeurism, sexist insults), 12% were related to sexual exploitation (prostitution, procuring, child sexual abuse material, corruption of a minor), and 9% were cases of sexual exhibition.

Once again, women represented most victims of these offences, making up 85%, while they constitute 52% of the French population. The rate of women victims increases rapidly with age until around 20 years old, after which it decreases. The rate reaches its peak between 15 and 19 years, with 8.8 victims per 1,000 women, and highlights a very high rate for girls aged 10 to 14 (8‰). More than half of the victims of sexual violence outside the family are minors at the time of the events (55%).

The average age of victims varies depending on the type of violence, and the SSMSI (Service Statistique Ministériel de la Sécurité Intérieure) notes that certain types of offences almost exclusively affect minors: sexual molestation, involvement in prostitution, child sexual abuse material, and corruption of minors.

France has enacted several legislative measures aimed at combating OSEA. These laws address a range of offences, including child sexual exploitation, the dissemination of illicit content, cyber-harassment, and protection of victims. Below is an overview of the key legislation:

Penal Code (Articles 227-22, 227-23 and 227-24) - Child Sexual Abuse Material

Article 227-22 of the Penal Code penalizes the act of attempting to corrupt a minor by inciting them to engage in sexual acts via the internet (“Code Pénal, Article 227-22,” 2021).

Under Article 227-23 of the French Penal Code, the production, distribution, and possession of child sexual abuse material is illegal (“Code Pénal, Article 227-23,” 2021). Article 227-24 further criminalises the dissemination of messages or images of a violent or pornographic nature that could be accessible to minors, including online (“Code Pénal, Article 227-24,” 2021).

Penal Code (Articles 225-5) - The fight against online pimping and human trafficking

Online pimping is also addressed by French legislation. Article 225-5 and subsequent articles of the Penal Code punish pimping, including when it is carried out through online platforms, with penalties of up to 10 years in prison and fines of up to 1.5 million euros in the most severe cases (“Article 225-5 - Code Pénal,” 2003).

Penal Code (Articles 222-33-2-2) – Cyber harassment

Cyber-harassment is punishable under Article 222-33-2-2 of the French Penal Code. It is defined as the act of harassing a person through repeated comments or behaviour, via messages or on the Internet, resulting in a deterioration of living conditions, and may cause psychological disorders in the victim. Penalties can include up to 3 years' imprisonment and a 45,000-euro fine.

If the harassment targets a vulnerable person (minor, sick or disabled person), or has led to the victim's suicide, the penalty may be increased (“Article 222-33-2-2 - Code Pénal,” 2024).

Penal Code (Articles 226-2-1) - The non-consensual distribution of sexual images

The non-consensual distribution of sexual images is punishable under Article 226-2-1 of the French Penal Code. This involves distributing images or videos of a sexual nature, obtained with or without the consent of the person concerned (“Article 226-2-1 - Code Pénal,” 2014).

Law on the Protection of Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence (2020)

This law expands protections for victims of domestic violence, but it also applies to online harassment and the non-consensual dissemination of intimate images. Penalties for sharing intimate images without consent can result in up to 2 years in prison and fines up to €60,000 (The Library of Congress, 2020).

Law to step up the fight against the prostitution system (2016)

The law aimed at strengthening the fight against the prostitution system and supporting prostitutes was adopted on April 13, 2016. The [Stratégie de lutte contre le système prostitutionnel et l'exploitation sexuelle](#), launched in May 2024, aims to strengthen the fight against the prostitution system by adapting the law to new forms of prostitution, in particular online prostitution (Gouvernement Français, 2024).

Right to be Forgotten (Loi pour une République numérique, 2016)

France has implemented strong privacy protections under the "Right to be Forgotten," allowing individuals, including victims of online sexual exploitation, to request the removal of search engine results related to their intimate information. This law works in conjunction with the **EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**.

More generally, the law provides for **aggravating circumstances** for offences committed online. For example, harassment or sexual assault committed via the Internet can result in harsher penalties, given the potential for massive and rapid dissemination of content on the networks.

The authorities can demand the blocking of sites disseminating illegal content, particularly child sexual abuse material, thanks to the law on combating hate content on the Internet. In addition, systems such as [Pharos](#), a platform for reporting online offences, enable citizens to report sexual crimes committed online so that the authorities can investigate them quickly.

Greece

In Greece, according to the annual cybercrime report for the year 2023, the Cyber Crime Division of the Hellenic Police received 91.431 calls. Among those, some concerned reports of crimes committed against minors and, therefore, immediate actions were required to protect the victim and identify the perpetrator. It is noted that the phone call to Cyber Crime Division (11188) is free of charge since incidents requiring immediate assistance are reported. In 2023, 13 victims of the offences of Child Pornography and Sexual Exploitation of Minors via the Internet were brought directly to Cyber Crime Division and complaints were filed (either by the parents or by the minor in person).

Also, Cyber Crime Division handled 298 new cases of Child Pornography & Online Sexual Exploitation of Minors in the year 2023. For this offence, 65 house-to-house searches were carried out and 13 perpetrators were arrested.

Compared to previous years, there has been an increase in the use of private chat rooms and/or groups in instant messaging applications for the exchange of child pornography material by offenders. Also, on the

websites that host child sexual abuse material, a better structure and categorization of the material was observed in order to target the victims. Specifically, the material refers to the victim's area of residence, name, social media account or contact information. There has been an increase in cases of non-consensual distribution of sexual images among minors, with material shared between them and adults.

There is also an increase in the crime of minors or young people under 25 years of age. Indicatively, in the case with the code name "Communicating Vessels", a case file was filed against 32 people, of which 6 were arrested. Those involved maintained access to social media page servers and sent a large volume of child sexual abuse and non-consensual distribution of sexual images. 30 minor victims aged 13 to 17, and 10 adult victims of non-consensual distribution of sexual images were identified. The majority of those involved were minors or had just recently reached adulthood. In 2023, case files were filed against more than thirty (30) minors by the Cyber Crime Division and in most cases the perpetrators were known to the victims.

Finally, in recent years there has been an increase in the production of photos and videos through AI (deepfake) with many minor victims.

Definition and criminalisation of grooming

In line with supranational and EU legislation, the Greek Criminal Code criminalises the act of whoever intentionally, by means of information and technology communication systems, proposes to a minor who has not reached the age of 15 to meet him or her, or a third party, with the aim of committing one of crimes entailing engaging in sexual activities with children or any offense related to child sexual abuse material (CSAM), when the proposal is followed by further acts leading to such a meeting. The relevant article of the Criminal Code is 348B and the punishment is imprisonment for at least 2 years and fine.

Moreover, the Code also criminalises the attempt to solicit a child who has not reached the age of consent to provide CSAM depicting him or her, by means of information and communication technologies (article 348B), punished by imprisonment of at least 1 year and a fine. Anyone who intentionally produces, offers, sells or in any way disposes, distributes, transmits, buys, procures or possesses child sexual abuse material or disseminates information regarding the commission of the above acts, through information systems, shall be punished by imprisonment of at least 2 years and a fine.

Pursuant to the Code, an adult who by means of the Internet or other media, or similar technologies, makes contact with a person under the age of 15, and with gestures or suggestions insults the honour of the minor in the realms of sexual life, is punished by imprisonment of at least 2 years. In case the contact is followed by a meeting, the adult is punished by imprisonment for at least 3 years (art. 337).

Definition of CSAM

Under Greek legislation, CSAM is identified as “child pornography”. The latter encompasses a wide range of content whose aim is to exploit minors. Among the types of content that fall within the category, there are images or videos of minors engaged in sexual activity, materials that show genital organs of minors and are primarily intended for sexual arousal, any type of child pornography made available online, and content that depicts minors in explicit scenarios, albeit simulated or animated (art. 348A-348C). Regarding the latter type of content, while it does not involve real children, it creates an environment conducive to child exploitation. Therefore, it is punished.

Criminalisation of producing CSAM

Pursuant to the Greek Criminal Code, anyone who intentionally produces, offers, sells or in any way disposes, distributes, transmits, buys, procures or possesses child sexual abuse material, or disseminates information regarding the commission of such acts through information systems, is punished by imprisonment of at least 2 years and a fine (art. 348B). As a result of the transposition of Directive 2011/93/EU in the national law, the Greek Criminal Code foresees the punishment by imprisonment of up to 3 years or a fine for whoever intentionally gains access to CSAM through information and communication technologies (art. 348A).

As regards the acquisition of CSAM, as well as its distribution, dissemination, transmission, offering, supplying or making available, all the acts in question are included in the provision of the Greek Criminal Code generally criminalising CSAM (art. 348A), punished by imprisonment of at least one year and a fine.

Anyone who intentionally produces, offers, sells or in any way disposes, distributes, transmits, buys, procures or possesses sexual abuse material or disseminates information regarding the commission of the above acts, through information systems, shall be punished by imprisonment of at least two years and a fine.

Aggravating circumstances applicable to grooming

As regards the use of torture or serious violence in the context of grooming, Greek legislation provides for an article of general application concerning whoever coerces another person into intercourse or other lewd act (art. 336). Such a provision, which provides for the punishment to be imprisonment, is also applicable to cases of grooming, when the act is carried out by means of violent behaviours. The Greek Criminal Code also provides for a general provision regulating the circumstance where an adult commits lewd acts against a minor, when the adult is in a position of trust or supervision, even if temporary. If the victim has not yet reached the age of 14, the punishment is imprisonment of at least 10 years and a fine. The term of imprisonment can be lower in case the victim has reached the age of 18. Furthermore, the penalty can be more severe when specific roles are played by the criminal in the life of the victim, for example If he or she is a person living with the child, a psychologist, a

teacher or a clergyman with whom the child has a spiritual relationship (art. 342). It can be concluded that relevant national laws only partially transpose the aggravating circumstances applicable to the act of grooming as established in supranational legal instruments.

Punishments of attempt, aiding or abetting of grooming

On the attempt to solicit a child to provide CSAM by means of information and communication technologies, Greek legislation also established a specific provision criminalising it (art. 348A).

Regarding the aiding or abetting of criminal offences, it is generally punished by the Greek Criminal Code (art. 45,46,47,48). Therefore, the aiding and abetting of grooming is also punished in the national legislation, as well as the aiding and abetting of any offence related to CSAM.

The safeguarding of consensual sharing of images and videos, and the protection of victims of grooming

The Code establishes in a general provision that lewd acts among children with less than 15 years of age are not punished when the age difference between them is less than 3 years. If the age difference amounts to more of 3 years, the children in question can be subject to reformative measures or treatment (art.339). Should the sharing of explicit images and videos fall under the national definition of “lewd acts”, Greek legislation can be considered as complying with the recommendation in supranational legal instruments in this regard.

Italy

In Italy, the crime of “sexual violence” is punished with imprisonment from 6 to 12 years. It occurs when a person (adult or child) is forced, with violence or threats or through abuse of authority, to commit or engage in sexual acts. When the acts of sexual violence are committed by an ascendant, parent, even adoptive, or guardian against a person under 18 years of age – among other aggravating circumstances - the penalty is increased by one third. The penalty is increased by half if the offence is committed against a child under 14 and is doubled if the offence is committed against a child under 10 years of age (ECPAT, 2024).

The Italian 114-emergency hotline handled a total of 64 cases of online sexual abuse, 90% of cases had children involved as victims (ECPAT, 2024). With the growing role of technology, also after the Covid-19 pandemic, the Italian legal system has been extremely careful in adopting an overarching framework when it comes to sexual offences and minors. Generally, the Italian laws do not only define as sexual offences only the events where physical touch occurs, but also those who are initiated by intentions, extortions and threats and do not necessarily culminate with the physical abuse (Save the Children Italia Onlus, 2012). On a national level, only the episodes of on-line enticement have reached 314, where 200 cases regarded children between 10 and 13

years olds (Polizia di Stato, 2024). In fact, the Italian legislature punishes acts of child grooming as friendship forming stage or relationship forming stage – that is, building a relationship of trust with the child – if the action is motivated by sexual purposes, including also forced prostitution and exploitation (Bernasconi, 2017). Accordingly, also those actions that take place through a webcam or a chat can be addressed as sexual offences.

Regarding the specific laws, Italy already signed in 2007 the Lanzarote Convention in which various aspects of sexual abuse and exploitation on-line on minors were defined and condemned. As a result, in 2012 twenty-two points of the Penal Code were modified or created *ex novo* to protect sexual freedom of minors (Bernasconi, 2017; ECPAT, 2024):

Article 600 *bis* is the result of the progressive dematerialization of the matter, as the crime of prostitution of minors and sexual abuses do not necessarily include the physical interaction to be considered as such. The offence can be condemned also when interaction happens over the internet and through a webcam, rendering therefore irrelevant the geographical position of the actors (Bernasconi, 2017). Moreover, the article punishes the grooming and recruitment aiming to prostitution of minors with a 12-years imprisonment (Camera dei Deputati, 2024).

Article 600-*ter* punishes both the coercion of minors to produce sexual abuse material and the possession, trade, spread and distribution – also through digital ways – of child sexual abuse material with imprisonment from 1 to five years (Camera dei Deputati, 2024; Save the Children Italia Onlus, 2012).

Articles 600 *quater* and 600 *quater*1 punishes anybody who accesses child sexual abuse material without justified reason through the internet, including also virtual pornographic content, therefore not real images but graphic and suggesting sexual actions (Camera dei Deputati, 2024; Macilotti, 2011; Save the Children Italia Onlus, 2012).

The article 609 *undecies* condemns all those actions that can fall into the definition of grooming, as the crime includes any action apt to gain the minor's trust also through the internet or other communication means. Therefore, Italian laws criminalise all the actions at the beginning of the soliciting – friendship and relationship forming stage – so there is no need for the encounter or abuse to take place to be considered a crime (Bernasconi, 2017).

Moreover, a National Centre for the fight against online child sexual exploitation was created within the Postal and Communication Police Service of the Ministry of Interior. The purpose is to monitor online spaces to detect child sexual abuse material/websites and dynamics that could harm children while also creating a blacklist of websites which access has been blocked by the Internet service providers (ECPAT, 2024; Macilotti, 2011). In 2023, 2.739 websites have been blocked and put in the said list, while 1.131 people have been identified and reported after downloading and sharing materials about sexual abuses on minors (Polizia di Stato, 2024). Overall,

Italian legislations have been reinforced and implemented over the years to frame sexual abuse, abusers and victims in the more effective way.

Portugal

OSEA cases in Portugal have increased significantly, with 12,450 cases reported in 2023, a 35% increase from 2019. Most of these cases involve child sexual exploitation and grooming through social media platforms. The country has implemented comprehensive legislation to combat OSEA, including the Penal Code, Cybercrime Law, and the National Plan to Combat Child Sexual Exploitation. These measures include criminalising child sexual abuse material, addressing illegal access, data interception, and dissemination of illicit content, and penalising non-consensual dissemination of intimate content. The National Plan to Combat Sexual Exploitation of Children (2023) aims to prevent, support, and train law enforcement officers. Other related legislation includes the National Health Plan 2030, the "Escolhas Program," free issuance of Citizen's Cards, free nursery services, the Childhood Guarantee Supplement, the Childhood Guarantee Action Plan 2022-2030, the European Child Guarantee, the Regional Coordination for Child Protection in Madeira, and regulations to prevent trafficking or abduction. The country's efforts aim to protect children and young people from these harmful digital crimes.

The Portuguese Criminal Police (PJ) has reported an increase in child sexual abuse material cases and challenges in monitoring sexual predators online. The cybercrime landscape in Portugal has expanded beyond traditional crimes, including offences covered under the Penal Code and other legal frameworks. The perception and reaction to sexual harassment have evolved significantly since 1989, with women now more likely to confront perpetrators and express their experiences. A study surveyed 407 university students found that the pandemic intensified online dependency, potentially having long-term impacts on mental health and behaviour. Interventions to promote digital literacy and healthier online habits among young adults are needed.

Key Legislation and Initiatives

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as "every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." The Portuguese law aligns with this definition, specifically Article 5(a) of the Law for the Protection of Children and Young People at Risk (Law No. 147/99 of September 1).

On an international level, on October 25, 2007, Portugal signed the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, also known as the Lanzarote Convention.

In Portugal, crimes related to child grooming are addressed within the Penal Code, specifically under Section II concerning crimes against sexual self-determination. Relevant articles include Article 171 (Sexual Abuse of Children), Article 173 (Sexual Acts with Adolescents), Article 176 (Child Pornography), and Article 176-A (Solicitation of Minors for Sexual Purposes).

Article 176-A was introduced into Portuguese law on August 24, 2015, through an amendment to Article 176 on Child Pornography (Law No. 103/2015). It stipulates that any adult using information and communication technologies to solicit a minor for a meeting with the intention of engaging in any acts described in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Article 171 or subparagraphs (a), (b), and (c) of paragraph 1 of Article 176 is subject to a prison sentence of up to one year. If the solicitation is followed by concrete actions leading to a meeting, the sentence can be extended to up to two years of imprisonment.

Further legislative measures include Law No. 40/2020 of August 18, which strengthens the procedural and punitive framework for crimes against the sexual freedom and self-determination of minors. It also mandates information dissemination and blocking access to websites containing child sexual abuse material. This law completes the transposition of the European Directive 2011/93/EU of December 13, 2011, amending the Penal Code and other relevant legislation.

Additional legislative initiatives include Law No. 55/2020, which outlines objectives, priorities, and guidelines for criminal policy for the 2020-2022 period, under the umbrella of Law No. 17/2006, aimed at protecting vulnerable individuals, ensuring sexual self-determination, and addressing cybercrime.

Key Legislation and Initiatives in Portugal to Combat Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OSEA):

- Penal Code (Articles 176-177): Criminalizes child sexual abuse material with severe penalties for its production, distribution, or possession.
- Cybercrime Law (Law No. 109/2009): Focuses on crimes such as illegal access, data interception, and distribution of illicit content, imposing strict penalties for crimes involving minors.
- Law No. 23/2017: Specifically addresses non-consensual dissemination of intimate content ("revenge porn"), with penalties of up to five years of imprisonment.
- National Plan to Combat the Sexual Exploitation of Children (2023): A strategic framework focused on prevention, victim support, and law enforcement training.

The "Selo Protetor" project in Portugal is a comprehensive initiative aimed at creating safer environments for children by implementing a structured risk and danger management system, ensuring compliance with child protection laws and fostering proactive prevention and collaboration across organizations (CNPDCPJ, n.d.).

For additional information and to report cases of child abuse or exploitation, visit the

<https://www.cnpdpcj.gov.pt/inicio>

With over 500 new instances reported each year, the Portuguese Criminal Police (PJ) is concerned about the increase in child sexual abuse material cases and online sexual predator surveillance. According to the 2023 Cybercrime Report Summary, online fraud, the exposure of personal data, and the spread of pornography are the primary problems in Portugal's cybercrime environment, which has expanded beyond the crimes specified in Law No. 109/2009. The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–2021 increased the number of cases that were reported, and in 2023, there were 2,916 complaints, a 37.29% increase. 12.6% of Portuguese workers reported experiencing sexual harassment, while 16.5% reported bullying, according to a 2015 study. With 88% of young adults in Portugal utilising the internet for socialising, entertainment, and academic purposes, the COVID-19 pandemic has also increased their reliance on it (Silveira et al., 2022).

Cyprus

In Cyprus, efforts to combat OSEA are spearheaded by the Cybercrime Unit within the Cyprus Police, with legislative support and public awareness initiatives coordinated through the Ministry of Justice and Public Order. The unit's mandate includes the investigation, prevention, and prosecution of various cyber offences, including CSAM, cyber harassment, and online grooming.

The Cyprus Police Cybercrime Unit reported investigating over 550 cases in a single year, a substantial number of which involved offences such as child sexual abuse material, cyber harassment, and financial fraud (Cyprus Police, 2022). In cases specifically related to child exploitation, 132 minors were interviewed as part of investigations, emphasising the unit's focus on identifying and supporting child victims. Additionally, Cyprus has been active in EU initiatives like the GRACE project, aimed at improving victim identification technology for child sexual exploitation cases. The unit is supported by the Digital Evidence Forensic Laboratory (DEFL), which specialises in analysing electronic devices and digital evidence for cyber-related crimes.

Cyprus's legal framework for combating OSEA includes several critical laws that align with EU standards:

- **Law 91(I)/2014:** This legislation, which implements EU Directive 2011/93/EU, addresses child sexual abuse material production, possession, and distribution. It also criminalises grooming and related activities, providing mechanisms for the notice and takedown of illicit online content.
- **Cyber Harassment and non-consensual sharing of sexual images:** Cyprus's legal code includes penalties for cyber harassment and non-consensual sharing of intimate images. These laws allow for prosecution of offenders involved in online harassment and coercion, with aggravated penalties if minors are involved.

The Cybercrime Unit and the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute actively work to promote internet safety through the 1480 helpline, which provides a resource for reporting cyber-related crimes, including online sexual exploitation. In the last quarter of 2023, the helpline received 740 calls, with 72% related to cybercrime such as hacking, fraud, and identity theft. Other reports included 31 cases of sexual extortion and 12 cases of non-consensual explicit material distribution (Cleaver, 2024; Ministry of Justice and Public Order, 2024).

To bolster internet safety, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute has implemented various educational programs under the **CYberSafety project** (Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, 2024; European Union, 2024). This initiative forms part of the European **Better Internet for Kids** framework and provides a range of interactive workshops, seminars, and training sessions on topics like cyberbullying, privacy protection, and digital literacy. One of the cornerstone events is **Safer Internet Day (SID)**, held annually. The 2024 SID event, hosted by the Pedagogical Institute and supported by the Ministry of Education, included interactive workshops, presentations, and a roundtable discussion. Attendees included students, educators, and key stakeholders from across Cyprus, highlighting digital well-being and responsible internet use.

To enhance public safety, the Cybercrime Unit regularly conducts educational programs in schools, addressing students, parents, and educators on topics like online grooming, digital harassment, and general internet safety. These efforts are bolstered by collaboration with NGOs such as Hope for Children CRC Policy Center, which supports victims and raises awareness about digital exploitation risks.

In the GREVIO report on Cyprus (Council of Europe, 2022), Cyprus's Children's Houses initiative offers a vital support structure for minors who are victims of sexual abuse. Established in 2017 and aligned with the Istanbul Convention standards, these centres provide a child-friendly, multidisciplinary environment where young victims can access all necessary services in one safe location. Each facility integrates forensic interviews, medical care, psychological support, and social services, ensuring that children can receive comprehensive support without needing to navigate multiple institutions.

This initiative follows the Istanbul Convention's guidelines for trauma-informed and child-sensitive services, which emphasise that children should have access to age-appropriate counselling and be supported in a way that minimises re-traumatization during legal and medical processes. In line with these standards, Cyprus has created specialised police units in each district to handle cases involving minors, facilitating a supportive judicial process that respects children's rights and emotional well-being.

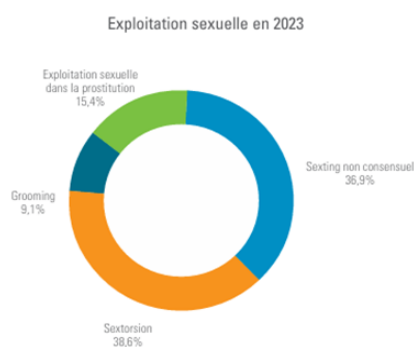
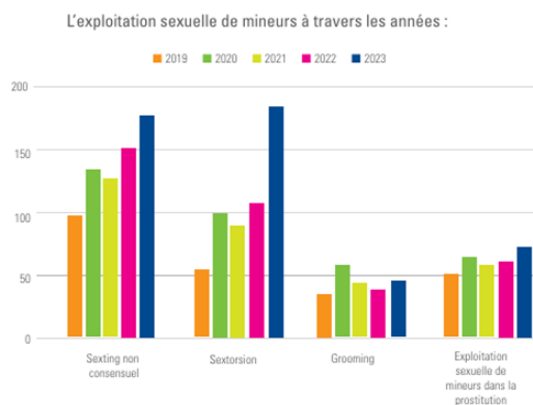
These efforts are further backed by national strategies to prevent violence against children, which include educational campaigns and training for professionals on child-friendly practices. As a result, Cyprus's Children's Houses contribute significantly to the protective framework for young victims, ensuring that their needs are addressed holistically within a supportive community environment.

Belgium

Statistics and Figures

In Belgium, limited data are available on the sexual exploitation and abuse of minors, especially online, as this topic remains under-documented both academically and publicly (ECPAT Belgique & Procureur, 2020). Similarly to the situation at the EU level, the existing figures are widely acknowledged as incomplete. This under-reporting stems from the hidden and opaque nature of these crimes, coupled with a lack of prioritisation by authorities in dedicating resources to better understand the issue. As a result, statistics from the criminal justice system, NGOs, and other institutions only reflect a small portion of the problem, based solely on the few reports, complaints, or requests for help received. The most recent and comprehensive source of information comes from Child Focus' 2023 annual report (Child Focus, 2023), which provides the following data:

A total of 2,895 cases related to the sexual exploitation of minors, including 2,421 reports of child sexual abuse images (via the imagesdabus.be contact point), 175 cases of non-consensual sexting, 183 cases of sexual extortion, and 43 incidents of online grooming. 253,480 images of child sexual abuse were removed from the web using the Arachnid analysis tool, out of a total of 909,243 images analyzed.



Source: Child Focus, Annual Report 2023

Other sources in Belgium offer a more detailed understanding of the scope of child abuse and sexual exploitation (not exclusively online). A 2020 Amnesty International Belgium study revealed that one in four young people (24%) have experienced rape, and nearly half (48%) of sexual violence victims were first exposed to it before the age of 19 (Amnesty International Belgique, 2020). These findings align with EU data, which estimates that 10-20% of children in Europe experience sexual abuse before turning 18 (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2019). Additionally, Belgian police statistics from 2023 offer limited insights into the prevalence of online child abuse and exploitation. The data reveal 57 recorded offenses of domestic sexual violence against children in 2023, a significant decrease from 295 in 2022 and 663 in 2021 (Police Fédérale, 2023). However, the statistics do not specify the types of violence or whether these offences were committed online or offline, limiting understanding of the true scale of abuse. The frequent merging of online and offline cases in reports further complicates efforts to address each type effectively, hindering appropriate intervention strategies.

Belgian Legal Framework

In March 2022, Belgium reformed its Criminal Code concerning sexual offences through the adoption of a new law aimed at making justice more efficient by creating a more precise, simple, and coherent text (Doc. parl., Ch. repr., sess. ord. 2019-2022, n°55-2141/001, p. 4). The reforms, which came into effect on June 1, 2022, revised the legal framework related to the sexual exploitation and abuse of minors (Title VIII, Chapter I/1, Section 2 of the Criminal Code). These offences now fall under Title VIII, Chapter I/1, Section 2 of the Criminal Code, specifically focusing on crimes and offences against people. Regarding all crimes of CSEA, Belgium defines a minor as anyone under 18 (Art. 100ter Belgian Criminal Code), with the age of sexual consent set at 16 (Art. 417/6 §1 Belgian Criminal Code). However, minors aged 14 to 16 can consent if the age difference with the other person is no more than three years (Art. 417/6 §2 Belgian Criminal Code). The section on the sexual exploitation of minors of the Criminal Code encompasses three types of criminal behaviour.

1) Approaching a Minor for Sexual Purposes (Grooming): The law criminalises the act of approaching a minor for sexual purposes, which was first introduced in 2014 (Etaamb, 2014). Article 417/24 of the Criminal Code outlines grooming as an act where an adult or another minor manipulates a minor into a meeting with the intent to commit sexual offences. For this offence to be proven, a judge must establish several elements: a proposal to meet a minor, the material acts that lead to that meeting, and the intent to commit a sexual crime. Importantly, the proposal for a meeting can occur online or offline, and the meeting does not need to take place for the offence to be complete (Fondation Samilia, 2021). The offence carries a penalty of 3 to 5 years of imprisonment, and aggravating circumstances can lead to harsher sentences, such as when the minor is under 10 years old (Article 417/50 of the Belgian Criminal Code). Importantly, the age of sexual consent is not relevant. In a related offence, Article 433bis/1 criminalises the luring of minors via information and communication technologies for criminal or delinquent purposes. This offence involves adults misleading minors through online means, using tactics such as hiding their identity or offering gifts. Unlike grooming, this offence does not require a physical meeting or sexual intent. It carries a penalty of 3 months to 5 years in prison (Article 433bis/1 of the Belgian Criminal Code).

2) Sexual Exploitation of Minors for Prostitution: While Article 417/25 addresses the incitement of minors into prostitution or debauchery, we will not delve into this topic further as it does not pertain to online child sexual abuse, which is the primary focus of this discussion.

3) Images of Sexual Abuse of Minors: The Criminal Code also targets the creation, possession, and dissemination of images depicting the sexual abuse of minors. Article 417/43 defines these images as any material that visually depicts a minor engaged in sexually explicit behaviour, whether real or simulated (Article 417/43 of the Belgian Criminal Code). Article 417/44 criminalises the production or dissemination of these images, with penalties of 5 to 10 years in prison and fines ranging from €500 to €10,000 (Article 417/44 of the

Belgian Criminal Code). Higher penalties apply if the crime is committed in an organised manner. Possession, acquisition, or access to child sexual abuse images is punishable by 1 to 3 years of imprisonment and fines from €500 to €10,000. The law includes an exception for consensual sharing of sexual content amongst minors aged 16 to 18 years old, but only in cases where the creation and transmission were voluntary and mutual.

In Belgian law, being a minor is a constitutive element for these offences, aligning with the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. When determining penalties, aggravating factors are considered, including whether the perpetrator held a position of trust, the age of the victim (especially if under 10), and any cultural or religious justifications cited (Delhaise, 2023).

2. Identification of OSEA

2.1. Risk and vulnerability factors

To effectively identify and assist OSEA victims, it is crucial to recognize the key risk and vulnerability factors. Common victim profiles often reflect broader societal inequalities: women in vulnerable situations, young girls, individuals living in poverty, those who have experienced childhood violence and abuse, individuals with limited access to education and job opportunities, and members of marginalised groups.

Besides, traffickers can belong to networks and mafia, but the profiles are wider than we think: young people below 25 years old that are very conscious regarding the use of social media and information technologies and people linked to other criminal activities such as drugs and arms trafficking and terrorism. Regarding the youngest, it is essential to notice that abusers can belong to close social circles from the victims, even when it comes to minors.

To illustrate the factors that increase risk and vulnerability, we can look at two types: weakening factors (phenomenon that can alternate judgement when decisions must be made) and triggering factors (which initiate the process of exploitation, such as leading to prostitution). These factors can be examined through three main lenses: intrafamilial, personal and social context.

	INTRAFAMILIAL CONTEXT	PERSONAL CONTEXT	SOCIAL CONTEXT
WEAKENING	- A weak self-esteem and devaluation - Trivialization and internationalisation of violence -Body self-conscious - Gender biases -Struggling with assuming its sexual orientation	- Violences, abuse - Sexual assault, rapes, incest and incestual environment - Porn exposure during childhood -Parental abandon and lack of affection -Parental injunction - Intergenerational trauma	- Gender stereotypes -Prostitution trivialization - Hypersexualization and porn - Precarity -Social isolation and wandering - Peer pressure - Addictions
TRIGGERING	- Emotional shock - Family breakdown - Fleeing from family and fugue - Foster placement - Domestic control (abuser, trafficker,) - Social disaffiliation - social reputation	- Precarity - Social isolation - Academic failure - Addict behaviours -Housing struggle - Lack of perspectives	- Meeting risky groups - Internet / Social Media - Client encounter - Being trapped and sold to a sex trafficking network

Additionally, several other important factors need to be considered:

A prior history of abuse, whether online or offline, can increase vulnerability, as victims may not recognize warning signs or may have been conditioned to normalise abusive behaviour. Trauma from bullying, neglect, or

sexual abuse can leave victims with unmet emotional needs that predators can exploit. About 64% of adults in the United States reported they had experienced at least one type of ACE before age 18. Nearly one in six (17.3%) adults reported they had experienced four or more types of ACEs (CDC, 2024).

Psychologically, victims may experience dissociation, creating a mental divide between the body and mind as a defence mechanism against violence (Saprea, 2023). This can lead to a reduced awareness of warning signals, increased tolerance to pain, suicidal thoughts, and other severe impacts. While dissociated, traumatic memories can overwhelm the victim in fragmented ways, without triggering emotional responses or stress. However, it is crucial to remember that in many of the cases, victims did not have a prior history of abuse. The CESAGRAM study program showed that 65% of victims went online because of loneliness which perpetrators took advantage of.

Lack of digital literacy is another significant vulnerability factor that can expose individuals, particularly young people, to OSEA. Digital literacy refers not only to the ability to use technology but also to understanding how to navigate the internet safely, recognize risks, and protect personal information. For instance, many young people may not understand the permanence of sharing explicit content online or how it can be used to exploit them (e.g., for blackmail or “sextortion”). Moreover, they may not be aware of the importance of privacy settings or how to report inappropriate behaviour, leaving them more vulnerable to repeated abuse and exploitation.

2.2. Methods and platforms used by perpetrators

When it comes to exploiting people online, particularly youth, perpetrators often demonstrate a high level of creativity. First, it is interesting to focus **on the reasons to use the Internet**, and regarding this aspect we can provide some key points to consider:

- **Lower cost:** they can use free chat software and websites to have unlimited access to targets.
- **Discretion / Anonymous posture:** by using these websites, perpetrators can use false profiles and jammers to appear anonymous.
- **Easy access:** by connecting to these international platforms, they have access to targets from all around the world. As a matter of fact, targeting young victims from another country involves less risks. They can also take advantage of multilingual software, making it easier to communicate across language barriers. Besides, to avoid getting caught, abusers can easily delete profiles and switch from one platform to another.
- **Hyper sexualization:** it involves the attribution by the media of a sexual character to a product or behaviour that has nothing intrinsically sexual about it. Hyper sexualization can be seen in magazines, videos, films, the fashion industry and particularly in advertising. When it comes to

perpetrators, they use these biases to attract predators online and hypersexualize the bodies of young people and minors.

- **Trivialization:** As this phenomenon is growing dangerously, wrongdoers are taking advantage of the trivialization of sexuality from the victims. Terms like "sugar daddy", "escorting", "sugar baby" or "content creator" are often used to downplay the risks involved, making exploitation appear less harmful.

Methods

Perpetrators of online sexual exploitation often employ calculated methods, resembling a marketing strategy, to identify, groom, and trap victims. They focus on social media platforms where youth are already exposing aspects of their lives (Instagram, Snapchat, Whatsapp, Tinder, Onlyfans etc...) as well as non-explicit websites originally used to find jobs and classified ads.

First, they target potential victims by analysing social media activity, looking for signs such as complaints about family issues, expressions of personal struggles or any kind of vulnerable signals.

After identifying their target, they initiate contact by sending private messages mentioning a common topic to create conversation (money, friendship, work etc...) using a caring tone to manifest their interest to the person. They avoid directly mentioning prostitution or sex, opting instead for terms like "services" or "easy money."

This process can take time depending on the person. Perpetrators often pretend to be an ideal partner who understands the victim's situation, offering emotional support and false promises of a better future. It is crucial to mention that the age gap between victims and perpetrators tends to lower as the peer-to-peer grooming phenomenon is growing. Indeed, the trust bond can appear stronger within the peer groups (YADA, n.d.).

Peer to peer grooming: Once trust is established, it becomes easier for the abuser to introduce the idea of providing "services", gradually manipulating the victim into exploitation. They often create the illusion of empowerment, telling the victims they can achieve their goals, control the situation, and "own their life".

Indeed, this whole process is genuinely based on the abuser scheme which follows strategic steps:

- choosing the vulnerable victim,
- isolating them,
- creating a threatening climate,

- moving to “action”,
- devaluing the victim and
- enforcing silence.

Platforms

As previously exposed, social media are privileged platforms due to the easy access to various types of profiles. However, once the victim is trapped and the sexual exploitation operating, other non-explicit platforms can be used to “rent” the profiles of the victims using marketing and objectifying codes. Indeed, classified ads or even property rental websites are used to promote the body of their victims through ambiguous ads. They are being exposed through intimate pictures next to a list of features and “services” they can offer.

Besides, they also use explicit platforms such as OnlyFans, that was originally created to share private and exclusive content to a restricted base of fans that would pay a monthly subscription or occasionally pay for a specific sexual content.

These platforms popularity rose during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the lack of employment with people trying to make money from home. Nevertheless, using these biases to sell sexual services online is often associated with sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Indeed, abusers use these to track and recruit victims of prostitution and people from the “sex industry”.

Proxolab video made by Mouvement du Nid France -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxUX-S8yqXM&t=5s&pp=ygUZcHJveG9sYWlgbW91dmVtZW50IGR1IG5pZA%3D%3D>

2.3. Recognizing the signs of OSEA

Online sexual abuse and exploitation often occur subtly, hidden within seemingly normal online interactions. It is essential to recognize certain behaviours that might indicate a person is at risk or already being targeted for abuse.

The signs that could indicate the presence of an OSEA case vary depending on the specific behaviour, but there are some common and worrying elements to monitor and that are often associated with psychological manipulation and control.

Below we analyse the main signs associated with four OSEA cases, although these same factors are also common for other forms of OSEA.

Grooming

- **Excessive interest:** An unknown person shows an unusually intense curiosity about someone's personal life or attempts to establish contact in inappropriate settings.
- **Secret conversations:** The person insists that online conversations or interactions remain confidential.
- **Offering gifts or favours:** The individual provides gifts, money, or other favours to earn trust and emotional engagement.
- **Emotional manipulation:** The person may use emotional manipulation tactics, such as playing the victim or requesting help for desperate situations, trying to gain the victim's sympathy or trust.
- **Requests for physical meetings:** After gaining trust, the individual may attempt to arrange an in-person meeting.
- **Solicitation of intimate material:** The groomer may request inappropriate or sexual photos, videos, or content.

Love Bombing

- **Excessive and rapid affection:** Over-the-top compliments, declarations of love, or deep interest within a very short period.
- **Constant and continuous messaging:** A continuous stream of messages, calls, or attention that may become overwhelming.
- **Requests for intimacy:** The manipulative person seeks to establish an intimate relationship quickly, attempting to accelerate the bond.
- **Attempts to isolate:** The manipulator might try to distance the victim from friends or family, making the relationship exclusive and controlling.
- **Sudden change in behaviour:** If the victim does not respond as expected, the manipulator may suddenly become cold or punitive.

Sexual Extortion

- **Requests for intimate photos or video:** An individual may ask for compromising images, promising discretion, only to later use them for blackmail.
- **Threats of exposure:** Once they obtain intimate material, the person who carries out the sexual extortion threatens to share it unless the victim complies with their demands, often for more sexual content or money.
- **Pressure to comply:** Intense pressure is applied to keep the situation secret, exploiting the victim's shame or fear.
- **Manipulative behaviour:** people who do sexual extortion often use guilt or fear of social consequences to force the victim to cooperate.

Cyberstalking

- **Offensive or threatening messages and excessive frequency:** Derogatory comments, insults, or threats, or oppressive control, sometimes disguised as concern or interest in the victim's life. These messages occur excessively over time.
- **Spreading rumours or false information:** Attempts to ruin the victim's reputation by spreading lies or embarrassing information.
- **Doxxing:** Publishing the victim's personal or sensitive information without their consent, often with the intent to damage their reputation or put them in danger.
- **Constant monitoring of online activities:** The stalker may constantly monitor the victim's posts, comments, and interactions on social media, leaving intrusive comments or even remaining silent, yet still demonstrating that they are following every move the victim makes online.

Another practice not to be underestimated is **Catfishing**, where a person creates a false identity to deceive others, often with the intent of starting a romantic relationship, committing fraud, manipulating, or gaining advantages. The signs that someone may be a victim of catfishing are often subtle, but there are several suspicious behaviours to watch for. Here are some of the main signs to look out for:

- Inconsistencies and ambiguities in information
 - **Contradictions:** The person may provide details about their personal situation that change over time, such as their age, occupation, geographical location, or background
 - **Vague data:** The person avoids answering specific questions about their life. Important information such as their workplace, school attended, or other biographical details may be

vague or ambiguous. In some cases, the catfisher may pretend to have a prestigious job but fail to provide specific details that can confirm their identity.

- **Evasive responses:** Often, the person avoids or ignores direct questions about important details or contradicts themselves when pressed for more specific information
- **Reluctance to provide visual proof.** The person provides only a few photos, often of poor quality or heavily curated, or may send images stolen from others (sometimes easily traceable through a reverse image search on Google). There are no updated or candid photos, like those real people might share in everyday life.
- **Requests for money or favours.** One of the most common signs of catfishing is a request for money. The person may claim to have unexpected financial or personal problems and ask for money to be sent, primarily through hard-to-trace methods (e.g., Western Union, cryptocurrencies) or the purchase of gift cards.
- **Suspicious social profiles:** A social media profile created by the catfisher may have few friends or followers, limited or absent interactions with other users, and a small number of posts or content. Additionally, there may be a lack of detailed personal information or different photos apart from those sent directly to the victim.
- **Strong reliance on written messaging:** The catfisher prefers to communicate through written messages, such as emails, messaging apps, or social media, rather than video.
- **Changes in tone:** The tone of the conversation may suddenly shift from affectionate to cold or distant without apparent reason, creating confusion for the victim. This narcissistic behaviour can be used to keep the victim in a state of emotional uncertainty.

2.4. Case studies among Europe

This section will display different best practices and case studies from the partners' countries, to give a real-life, practical and contextual example of how OSEA can take place and/or can be tackled and how impacts the victims' lives.

France/Martinique

Partner/Country of contribution	D'Antilles et D'Ailleurs, Martinique
Title of case law:	The S. case in Martinique

Year of reference	2024
Summary	This case concerns the story of S., a teenager from Martinique who is being supported by social services. The case concerns a situation of grooming and child exploitation in prostitution where offline and online activity are closely linked. This case also shows the importance of collaboration between services so that young people who are victims of sexual exploitation can be helped to interrupt and recognize this situation.
Situational Analysis	This case was handled by Mouvement du Nid, a French grassroots association and social movement advocating for civic, political, and cultural action against the prostitution system and all forms of violence against women. Social workers from the Mouvement du Nid don't work directly with minors because when it comes to them, the primary institution is the State office for child protection (Aide Sociale à l'Enfance - ASE). However, it cooperates with this agency to support children and young adults who are victims or potential victims of prostitution, whether through trafficking networks or other means. Before presenting this case study, it is important to acknowledge the challenges in identifying acts of prostitution, which often makes obtaining objective data difficult. However, factors such as sexual abuse and incest significantly increase the risk of individuals becoming ensnared in the prostitution system. Consequently, as social workers, it is crucial to monitor official reports to effectively assist both potential and confirmed victims. In Martinique, for instance, recent findings from the National Assembly indicate that 4% of women experienced incest during their childhood, compared to 2.5% in mainland France. This case study focuses on S., a 14-year-old girl currently receiving support from child protection services (CPS) due to ongoing intrafamilial conflicts. The CPS is working with S. and her mother to rebuild their family bond, as they are living together without her father, whose absence remains unexplained. As a result, S. lives at her mom's house, but she is also followed by the day-time protection service. She receives support from educators and has occasional sessions with a psychologist. Through the CPS, she has access to workshops on a range of topics, including health, education, well-being, sports, and nutrition.

	Additionally, she benefits from the unconditional support and attentive listening of the educational team. The CPS reached out to Mouvement du Nid after S.'s mother began reporting instances of her running away from home. S. was frequently staying out late, returning home around 3 or 4 a.m., and when she did return, she offered no explanations for her absences. Additionally, she had new belongings, such as clothing, jewellery, and bags, and her style had noticeably changed. Her mother also observed that S. was leaving home with strangers, whom S. referred to as friends—specifically, the fathers of her friends. Moreover, the educational team noticed that S. was constantly using her phone, hiding what she was sending. The only pictures they could see were the ones from her Instagram page, in which she appeared physically exposed (pictures in swimsuit and underwear), posing in hypersexualized postures. As the psychologist probed for deeper insights into her experience, S. described herself only as an "online businesswoman," asserting that she was successfully managing both the situation and her desired outcomes. This response is indicative of classic symptoms of Online Social Engagement Addiction, characterised by her obsession with financial rewards and her compulsive need to frequently check her phone while concealing her online activity. Furthermore, the educational team later discovered that she was managing multiple accounts on the same social media platforms, including Instagram and Telegram, which underscored the depth of her involvement. Based on this information and observations, the CPS decided to reach out to Mouvement du Nid for guidance on how to address these concerns with S. in a way that would not induce feelings of guilt or shame. Notably, when the psychologist brought up S.'s running away and her new belongings, S. became emotional and began to cry but did not provide any further details. In response to this request, Mouvement du Nid proposed to intervene by facilitating a workshop focused on emotional, affective, and sexual well-being. This approach was suggested to ensure that S. did not feel singled out while allowing for a discussion on various topics related to sexuality.
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Our workshop was structured around two main tools: brainstorming using a whiteboard positioned at the centre of the table, where participants each had a pen, and photolanguage, a projective technique designed to elicit rich verbal responses. Participants could choose a photograph to discuss with the group or express their feelings about it.

During the session, S. quickly brought up prostitution and shared her insights about “what the other girls do.” She specifically referred to how people she knows use social media, mentioning terms like “wh****” and the perpetrators who recruit girls. When S. appeared to unconsciously blame the victims, we attempted to help her understand that they were not responsible for their circumstances; rather, it was the men who exploited minors and young adults. Although this was a challenging concept for her, she ultimately agreed.

S. also stated that many girls “liked it” when offering “sex services,” even to older men, which indicated a troubling trivialization and denial of the issue. By the end of the workshop, she mentioned that some girls were in love with the men who “managed” their activities, suggesting that for them, this arrangement was a way to contribute financially to their relationships.

The psychologist noted that S. was strikingly precise in her descriptions, revealing a clear reflection of her own experiences. For the Mouvement du Nid team, this was predictable, as she exhibited unmistakable signs of desensitisation to explicit behaviours, particularly concerning minors of her own age.

Moreover, during the workshop, S. inadvertently illustrated the typical tactics employed by predators to exploit youth online. When she discussed the emotional attachments that victims can form, she inadvertently highlighted a key aspect of grooming: the initial contact through everyday social media interactions, followed by a calculated process of building trust through texting, calling, and love bombing.

Following this intervention, S.’s mother continued to notice instances of her running away and informed the CPS that her other daughter—who no longer lives with them—had to pick S. up from various locations on the island, including strangers’ houses where other girls were present with older men.

	Her sister successfully located S. through a geolocation message sent via WhatsApp, which appeared to be a forwarded communication. This clearly indicates that the perpetrators orchestrated the sex trafficking operations using WhatsApp as a platform. This situation starkly illustrates the inextricable connection between online grooming and offline abuse, highlighting the dangers of digital manipulation in facilitating such crimes. At this point, the service felt compelled to report the situation to the authorities and the judge to initiate a formal investigation. In an educational and transparent manner, the service informed S. of the situation in the presence of the psychologist. Upon realising that they were aware of her victimisation, S. became emotional and cried, and, after a week, she returned to the service but expressed that she no longer wanted to see the psychologist. To establish effective cooperation between the child protection office and the Mouvement du Nid, the association plans to visit S. and organises a series of workshops to help her identify with them and build trust, enabling her to share her truth and escape these violent situations. The Mouvement du Nid primary objective will be to discuss her experiences and gradually help her deconstruct the control exerted by her perpetrators, ultimately empowering her to denounce them.
Source	Social workers from the <u>Mouvement du Nid</u> - Martinique delegation

Greece

Partner/Country of contribution	TSoC - Greece
Title of case law:	Iri's online sexual exploitation & crisis reactions
Year of reference	2023-2024
Summary	M. was a fifteen-year-old girl. She was adopted when she was one year old from an educated, wealthy woman. Her adoptive father was not a daily presence in her life; he was a very good friend and ex-partner of her adoptive mother, who helped with the adoption process. Her adoptive mother was perceived as strict and judgmental, which led to many arguments between her and M. On the other hand, M. went through a rebellious phase during her teenage years. She has also been described as a person who was overly involved in sexual activities. M. was in contact via social media with various adults. A 50-year-old man approached her online, sent her a friend request, and for approximately four months, they were in touch. After trust was established, the 54-year-old man guided the discussion into sexual topics. He continued to besiege her and convinced her to meet him in person. They met, and he forced her to enter his car, took her to a booked Airbnb, and tried to sexually abuse her. Iris defended herself and ran away before the sexual act was completed later, she found a bank card in her bag. It is worth mentioning that after that incident, M's rebellion increased, and according to our organisation's data, M. was reported missing four times in one year.
Situational Analysis	The case of M. raises several legal and contextual issues within the Greek legal framework. The legal age of consent is set at 15 years old, which means that any sexual activity with a minor under this age is considered statutory rape. In this case, the 54-year-old man's actions of engaging in sexual discussions and attempting to sexually abuse M. constitute a clear violation of law. In terms of

	online safety and prevention of crimes against minors, Greece has laws in place that aim to protect children from online predators and cyberbullying. Law 4577/2018 (Measures for child protection from online threats and other provisions) focuses on protecting children from online predators, cyberbullying and other online threats. Laws include provisions for the monitoring of online activities and the prosecution of individuals who engage in harmful behaviours towards minors online and implementing measures to enhance online safety for children. The fact that Iris was reported missing multiple times in one year raises concerns about her safety and well-being. According to law 4478/2017 (Measures to protect minors from criminal activities and other provisions) authorities are required to take immediate action when a minor is reported missing, and measures must be taken to ensure their protection and safe return. Additionally, there may be a need for further support and intervention to address the underlying issues that may have contributed to Iris's rebellious behaviour and vulnerability to exploitation. Overall, this case highlights the importance of enforcing existing laws and implementing preventive measures to protect minors from harm, both online and offline, in the Greek context.
Additional comments	Strengths of the case law in the context of Iris's situation include: 1. Legal Protections: The existing Greek laws provide legal protections for minors against sexual abuse and exploitation. The legal age of consent sets clear boundaries for acceptable behaviour, and statutory rape laws offer specific legal remedies for cases involving minors. 2. Reporting Mechanisms: The fact that Iris was reported missing multiple times within a year shows that there are reporting mechanisms in place to address cases of missing minors promptly. This allows for swift action to be taken to ensure the safety and well-being of the minor. 3. Online Safety Measures: The Greek legal framework includes provisions for online safety and protection against cyber-related crimes targeting minors. These measures can help prevent online predators from exploiting individuals in vulnerable situations like Iris. Weaknesses of the case law in the context of Iris's situation include:

	1. Enforcement Challenges: Despite having strong legal protections, enforcement of these laws can be challenging, especially in cases involving online interactions and exploitation. Holding perpetrators accountable can be complex and require specialised expertise. 2. Support and Intervention: While legal measures are important, there may be a lack of adequate support and intervention services for minors like Iris who may be vulnerable to exploitation. Addressing the underlying issues that contribute to risky behaviour and providing holistic support is crucial for long-term protection. 3. Coordination and Collaboration: Ensuring effective coordination and collaboration among law enforcement, social services, and other relevant stakeholders is essential in addressing cases of exploitation and abuse. Lack of coordination can lead to gaps in protection and support for victims. The relevance of this case lies in its reflection of real-world challenges faced by minors and the need for a comprehensive approach that combines legal protections, support services, and prevention strategies. By examining the strengths and weaknesses of the existing legal framework in the context of this case, we can identify areas for improvement and advocate for better protections
Source	https://www.infovictims.gr/en/the-rights-of-victims-of-crime

Italy

Partner/Country of contribution	Italy - CESIE
Title of case law:	31-year-old arrested for online grooming against a 12-year-old child
Year of reference	2024
Summary	The case is about a 31-year-old male, from Catania, Sicily, who was arrested in October 2024 for possession of child sexual abuse material and online grooming and abuse of minors. Investigative activities began with the complaint of the mother of a 12-year-old minor, residing in the province of Catania, who had found on her daughter's smartphone, the presence of numerous conversations, from which it emerged that the child, after being lured online by a 31-year-old man, had sent the man self-produced videos and images. The complex analytical activities, carried out by the staff of the Operational Centre for Cyber Security of Catania on the smartphone in use by the minor, not only made it possible to find what was reported by the mother, but also showed that the suspect had managed, over time, to subjugate the victim psychologically, forcing her to share sexual services online, even inducing her to get injuries. The investigators of the Postal Police, once they traced the identity of the subject, obtained, from the District Prosecutor's Office of Catania, the timely issuance of a search decree, during which, following the discovery of numerous images and videos with sexually abused minors, they proceeded to arrest the 31-year-old in flagrante delicto. The Catania District Prosecutor's Office, which coordinated the investigation, charged the suspect with various conducts related to the sexual exploitation of minors, including those of solicitation, sexual assault, enslavement, and dissemination and possession of child sexual abuse material.
Situational Analysis	This case displays several of the elements that need to be addressed when talking about OSEA. Firstly, it shows how it can be difficult to see and identify from a parent's perspective as the online dynamics are often extremely hidden.

	The mother could only realise and see what was happening once the child was asleep and accidentally left her phone on. Secondly, the psychological subjugation plays quite a role in paving the way to obtaining child sexual abuse material and the same subjugation is made possible by the very young age of the victim. Thirdly, the legal consequences that the defendant undergoes include not only online grooming, but other and deeper crimes like enslavement and possession of child sexual abuse material.
Source	https://www.rainews.it/tgr/sicilia/articoli/2024/10/adesca-bambina-di-12-anni-online-31enne-arrestato-per-violenza-sessuale-9f223c51-7fa5-468a-b2a1-60ac707af076.html https://www.catanianews.it/adolescenza-minori-online-e-deteneva-sul-cellulare-foto-e-video-con-minori-vittime-di-abusi-sessuali-arrestato/ https://catania.gds.it/articoli/cronaca/2024/10/24/adesca-una-minorenne-per-esso-online-arrestato-un-trentunenne-in-provincia-di-catania-5b211c66-a5e1-489a-90d4-92b12dda7919/

Portugal

Partner/Country contribution	Storytellme, Portugal
Title of case law:	Online Grooming and Criminal Responsibility of Diogo Santos Coelho, Founder of RaidForums
Year of reference	2022 (legal proceedings and extradition hearings reference)
Summary	This case centers around Diogo Santos Coelho, a Portuguese national accused of creating and managing RaidForums, a platform that became a major hub for trading stolen data on the dark web. Coelho, who began developing the platform at age 14, claims he was a victim of online grooming, manipulated by

	older hackers into illegal activities. His defense emphasizes his vulnerability due to undiagnosed autism during this period. Despite claims of initial victimization, U.S. authorities allege that Coelho profited from facilitating illicit transactions even into adulthood. Arrested at Gatwick Airport in the United Kingdom during a visit to see his mother and sisters, Coelho faces possible extradition to the United States, where he risks up to 57 years in prison. Currently, he is under house arrest in London while awaiting a final decision on his extradition.
Situational Analysis	Diogo Santos Coelho began developing RaidForums at age 14, using it initially to engage in relatively innocuous online pranks. However, older online "friends" and collaborators allegedly exploited his skills, leading to the platform's transformation into a major cybercrime marketplace. Coelho's legal defence, supported by psychiatric evaluations, argues he was subjected to online grooming and lacked the maturity and judgment to understand the full implications of his actions due to autism, which was not diagnosed at the time. The platform eventually facilitated the sale of sensitive stolen data, allegedly generating millions of euros. Coelho was arrested in January 2022 upon arrival at Gatwick Airport and detained for seven months in Wandsworth Prison in the UK. His family, who moved between Portugal and the UK, experienced severe challenges, including his mother's battle with Huntington's disease and a fractured home environment. Coelho's mental health, history of online grooming, and autism diagnosis are central to the arguments against his extradition to the United States.
Additional comments	Coelho's case highlights the complexities of addressing cybercrime when juvenile grooming, mental health conditions, and cross-border legal challenges are involved. Portuguese authorities declined to intervene in his extradition proceedings, despite arguments from his defence that some crimes occurred on Portuguese soil. Coelho's legal team emphasizes the severe mental health risks he faces under potential incarceration in the U.S., advocating for extradition to Portugal instead. The case underscores the need for greater safeguards for vulnerable youth online and raises critical questions about accountability and rehabilitation.
Source	https://cnnportugal.iol.pt/diogo-santos-coelho/raidforums/existem-fortes-provas-que-hacker-foi-vitima-de-grooming-como-um-miudo-de-14-anos-montou-um-imperio-milionario-b/20240210/65c569b4d34e371fc0bce1b0

Cyprus

Partner/Country of contribution	Cyprus
Title of case law:	Implementation of the Children's House Model for Minor Victims of Sexual Abuse
Year of reference	2017-Present
Summary	In response to the growing awareness and need for specialized support for minors affected by sexual abuse, Cyprus implemented the Children's House model in 2017, operated by Hope For Children CRC Policy Center. The Children's House serves as a central, child-friendly hub where minors can receive coordinated services, including forensic interviews, psychological counselling, legal assistance, and medical support, all under one roof. This model, based on the Icelandic "Barnahus" model, was introduced as a part of Cyprus's commitment to the Istanbul Convention to provide trauma-informed care to young victims and reduce secondary victimisation by minimising the need for multiple, potentially distressing interviews across different institutions. The Children's House has become a recognized best practice in Cyprus, offering a comprehensive approach that fosters cooperation between law enforcement, social services, and legal authorities. It enables a swift, compassionate response to cases of abuse and promotes healing by addressing both immediate needs and long-term well-being. Since its inception, the model has improved the quality of evidence gathering, strengthened child protection protocols, and created a more supportive environment for minors going through the legal process.
Situational Analysis	The Children's House model in Cyprus represents a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach to supporting minors who have experienced sexual abuse. This model provides a single, safe location where all necessary services—such as forensic interviews, psychological counselling, legal aid, and medical assistance—are available under one roof. How the Model Operates:

	1. Centralised, Child-Friendly Environment: Upon entering the Children’s House, minors are greeted in a comforting and age-appropriate setting designed to minimise distress. This environment is crucial for establishing a sense of safety and trust, enabling children to communicate more openly. 2. Integrated Services: Professionals from various fields collaborate in the Children’s House, including social workers, psychologists, law enforcement officers, and advocates. This integration reduces the need for children to visit multiple agencies, thus limiting repeated recounting of traumatic events and avoiding additional psychological strain. 3. Forensic and Therapeutic Process: A trained forensic interviewer conducts the interview with the minor, often observed remotely by law enforcement to ensure it meets legal standards without requiring the child to repeat their account multiple times. Psychologists and social workers are also available to provide immediate counselling and support throughout the process. 4. Alignment with the Istanbul Convention: The Children’s House model is grounded in the principles outlined by the Istanbul Convention, prioritising trauma-informed, child-sensitive practices that safeguard minors’ well-being while facilitating the judicial process. This model has shifted the discourse in Cyprus toward a more compassionate, child-centred approach to handling cases of abuse. The model in Cyprus has become a best practice for child protection, setting a new standard for how minor victims are supported through complex judicial processes while promoting healing and resilience.
Additional comments	Strengths of the Children’s House Model: 1. Integrated, Child-Friendly Support: By consolidating services in one location, the Children’s House provides a supportive and safe environment that minimises trauma and enhances the well-being of young victims. 2. Multidisciplinary Collaboration: The model promotes strong cooperation between police, healthcare providers, legal professionals, and social workers, improving outcomes and accountability.

	3. Alignment with International Standards: Adopting the Barnahus model in Cyprus with best practices in the European Union and globally. Weaknesses and Areas for Improvement: 1. Resource Limitations: Expanding the model to reach more children, particularly in less accessible areas, is a priority. 2. Long-Term Funding and Sustainability: Ensuring consistent funding for these services is essential to maintain and expand support. The Children's House model is a pioneering practice in Cyprus that highlights the positive impact of trauma-informed, multidisciplinary approaches in addressing child sexual abuse. It has changed how such cases are handled, placing greater emphasis on the victim's comfort and healing. This case study demonstrates the importance of adopting international best practices to enhance local child protection frameworks.
Source	Council of Europe. (2022). GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report: Cyprus - Istanbul Convention Action against violence against women and domestic violence. Retrieved from https://rm.coe.int/grevio-inf-2022-29-cyprus-report-for-publication-eng-for-publication/1680a91c5b Hope For Children CRC Policy Center. (n.d.). Children's House Cyprus. Retrieved from https://www.uncrcpc.org.cy

Belgium

Partner/Country of contribution	Belgium
Title of case law:	Criminal Court of Antwerp, Antwerp department, 9 th April 2024, unpublished. This case is related to the conviction of a man who forced minors to have webcam sex. As this judgement has not been published, the presentation of the facts is based on an analysis conducted by Charlotte Somers, a researcher

	at KU Leuven [1]. [1] Somers, C. (2024). Veroordeling man die minderjarigen tot webcamseks dwong. Computerrecht, Wolters Kluwer Nederland, 2024(137). C. Somers gained access to this case law through the lawyers representing one of the parties involved in the trial.
Year of reference	2024
Summary	This case involves the encounter between a 14-year-old girl, residing in a youth institution in Belgium, and the defendant, whom she met through a game on Snapchat. After meeting online, the defendant suggested they met in person and offered packs of cigarettes in exchange for having sexual relations. Later, he sent her a package of sex toys, providing instructions on how to use them through Snapchat. In 2020, the young girl reported the incident to the police. Following the complaint, the defendant was arrested in July 2021, and a search was conducted. More than 60,000 images were discovered on his mobile phone, along with several screenshots from the 'Snap(chat) game.' These revealed that the defendant had been in contact with multiple underaged girls. The defendant's requests went from asking the girls to send pictures of their face to asking nudes, to finally escalate to asking them to perform far-reaching sexual acts. During the investigation, it was found that the defendant had manipulated individuals into participating in the "Snap" game by offering various incentives, such as cash prizes, gift cards, AirPods, or an iPhone 11 upon completing each level. As the game progressed, he demanded increasingly explicit images, using threats to share the already obtained photos or videos as a means of coercion. In total, he targeted around 20 victims, all girls between the ages of 10 and 16, primarily from Belgium and the Netherlands. The defendant was fully aware of the victims' ages and deceived them about his own. While in pre-trial detention, which was later changed to electronic monitoring after a month, the defendant continued his criminal activities related to the Snapchat game. In June 2022, he was arrested for a second time, leading to

	another search where additional IT equipment was confiscated. During this search, further screenshots of the Snapchat game were discovered.
Situational Analysis	The criminal court of Antwerpen found the defendant guilty of multiple offenses, including aggravated rape [1], and inducing, promoting, or facilitating the fornication or prostitution of minors with aggravating circumstances [2]. Additionally, he was convicted of violating sexual integrity and committing non-consensual sexual acts with minors [3]. The court also ruled on charges of producing, distributing, possessing, and acquiring images of child sexual abuse [4] as well as cyber luring [5]. The court sentenced the defendant to seven years in prison, along with a 10-year suspension of his civil and political rights. He will remain under the jurisdiction of the sentencing court for an additional 10 years after completing his main sentence. The court also ordered the confiscation of several items, including the defendant's mobile phone, and mandated that he pays compensation to the victims. [1] Articles 417/11, 417/15, and 417/23 of the Belgian Criminal Code. [2] Articles 417/25, 417/26, and 417/50 of the Belgian Criminal Code. [3] Articles 417/7, 417/16, 417/17, and 417/23 of the Belgian Criminal Code. [4] Articles 417/44, 417/46, and 417/50 of the Belgian Criminal Code. [5] Article 433bis of the Belgian Criminal Code.
Additional comments	The decision mentioned above was selected due to the limited accessibility of case law in Belgium. While Article 149 of the Belgian Constitution mandates the publicity of judicial decisions in accordance with the right to a fair trial under Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights, this requirement is not yet properly implemented. The Belgian legislator adopted the law of October 16, 2022[1], to establish a Central Register for judicial decisions, known as Just Judgment. Although the register is expected to contain all judicial decisions in digital format from September 30, 2023, it remains non-operational [2], which continues to hinder access to case law, including those related to online child sexual abuse in Belgium.

	This judgement serves as a positive example, as the court considered the significant moral and psychological impact of the defendant's actions on the victims and their communities, recognizing that they would carry lifelong scars. The court also highlighted its concern regarding the defendant's behaviour of seeking contact with minors despite being under electronic monitoring. Moreover, a psychiatric evaluation indicating a high risk of recidivism further justified the court's firm decision in this case [3]. [1] Loi du 16 octobre 2022 visant la création du Registre central pour les décisions de l'ordre judiciaire et relative à la publication des jugements et modifiant la procédure d'assises relative à la récusation des jurés, M.B., 24 octobre 2022. [2] Gillard, E. (2024, May 10). <u>Le Registre central pour les décisions judiciaires: prévu par la loi mais non encore créé! Justice-en-ligne.</u> [3] Sommers, C. (2024). Veroordeling man die minderjarigen tot webcamseks dwong. Computerrecht, Wolters Kluwer Nederland, 2024 (137).
Source	See above.

3. Prevention of OSEA

3.1 Cybersecurity and making safe online choices

In the digital era, it is about time to make sure that children's rights are fully protected and fulfilled. Making online platforms safe, private, and secure, we can empower young digital citizens and draw the way for a future where their rights will be ensured and their privacy respected.

Cybersecurity refers to the practices and technologies that protect computer systems, networks, and data from unauthorised access, damage, or theft. For young people, this means understanding how to safeguard their online presence and personal information. Young people are often targets for cybercriminals due to their frequent use of **social media and online platforms**. Understanding cybersecurity is **essential for protecting themselves from potential threats**.

By staying informed, vigilant, and proactive about their online safety, young individuals can enjoy a secure

and positive digital experience.

Cybersecurity plays a vital role in protecting young people, as they navigate the digital world. **Prevention mechanisms**, such as using strong passwords, enabling two-factor authentication, and avoiding sharing personal information online, are crucial in keeping them safe from cyber threats like hacking, phishing, and malware. Educating teenagers on these practices and **raising awareness about potential online risks** empowers them to protect their digital identities and personal data, fostering a more secure online environment.

Moreover, schools, along with parents and other educational institutions, can play a key role by integrating cybersecurity education into their curricula and daily interactions, helping young people understand the importance of online safety. This collaborative, proactive approach ensures that youth are better prepared to handle emerging digital threats in a rapidly changing technological landscape. **By involving families and a broader network of front-line defenders**, including youth workers and educators, the collective effort fosters a more comprehensive understanding of digital risks and promotes safer online behaviours.

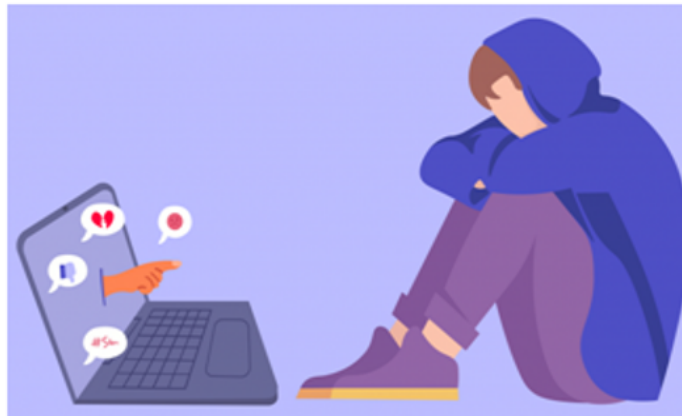
116 111 is the number specially reserved for child helplines in Europe.

A good **European initiative focused on fostering safe online spaces for children** is the European strategy for better internet for kids (BIK+), aiming to ensure that children are protected, respected and empowered online in the new Digital Decade.

BIK+, proposes actions around three pillars:

1. **Safe digital experiences** to protect children from harmful and illegal online content, conduct, contact and risks as young consumers and to improve their well-being online through a safe, age-appropriate digital environment, created in a way that respects children's best interests.
2. **Digital empowerment** so all children, also those in situations of vulnerability, acquire the necessary skills and competences to make sound choices and express themselves in the online environment safely and responsibly.
3. **Active participation**, respecting children by giving them a say in the digital environment, with more child-led activities to foster innovative and creative safe digital experiences.

Under BIK+, the Better Internet for Kids portal (Better Internet for Kids) provides resources and best practice, which reach out to children, parents and teachers (COMMISSION).



Safe use of the Internet: Tips for children

Adopting safe online behaviour can significantly reduce risks. Some **important tips youth workers can share with children and young people** are listed below:

- **Keep your email password secret from everyone.** If you think someone has learned your password, change it immediately. Try to always have a password that no one can guess.
- **Never agree to meet strangers you met on the Internet.** If you want to meet someone, make sure it is always done in a public place and accompanied by your parents/caregivers and/ or a trusted adult.
- Accept friend requests only from people you know in real life. Unknown users may not have good intentions.
- **When chatting in a chatroom, be very careful and do not give out your personal information,** such as your email address, home or school address, or phone number. Try to verify the identity of who you're talking to. If something feels off, trust your instincts.
- **Avoid websites for those over 18.** Warnings are there to protect us. It is preferable to discover websites with educational, entertaining and informative content appropriate to your age and interests.
- **Always take a moment to consider the links you click on,** especially in emails, social media, or chat messages. If a link seems suspicious, it's best to avoid it.
- **Don't download illegal programs or movies:** Besides being illegal, you might be installing dangerous software.
- Don't share personal information, photos or videos online. Once something is shared, it is difficult to take it back.

- **Be aware of who you are chatting to.** By sending a photo of yourself to that person, you don't know how they will use it, what they will use it for, who they will send it to, or whether by opening your computer or phone camera you are being recorded or not.
- **Learn to recognize false information/fake news.** Not everything you read online is true. Check the information from reliable sources before you believe it.
- **It is important not to open emails received from strangers.** Never open attached files received from such emails because they can transmit viruses to your computer. Ask your parents to install a spam filtering system so you can receive only the messages you want.
- If a friend of yours contacts you and asks for money, contact them by phone first. His profile may have been stolen by scammers.
- **Be careful before confirming your passwords.** No social networking site sends an e-mail asking you to confirm your password by filling in a form. If you receive such an e-mail, it may be a phishing attack.
- **If you believe you are a victim of sexual extortion/grooming,** inform the police authorities directly (either named or anonymously) or through another person in order to both receive specialist psychological help and to deal with the criminal offence.
- **Before using an online service or application** (e.g. Snapchat, Instagram application), read the operating rules/term of use.
- **Remember that if you need help** there are specialists who can help you at all times when this may be required.
- **In case you are a victim, do not continue communication** with the perpetrators and do not send them money, you are probably a long victim they've put pressure on to give them money. Don't panic, ask for help from a trusted adult that you know. Remember you are not alone, there is always someone at hand to help you.
- **Check what information you have posted publicly** so that you're aware of what someone can find with a simple public search.

In an increasingly digital world, **young people must prioritise their online safety and well-being.** Understanding cybersecurity not only helps protect against threats but also empowers youth to navigate the internet confidently. By adopting safe online behaviours, utilising privacy settings, and engaging in positive online communities, young individuals can create a secure digital space for themselves and those around them. The key to enjoying the internet lies in **making informed and conscious choices.** By embracing a proactive approach to online safety, the digital world can be joinable and the risks minimal.

3.2. The role of Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Preventing OSEA is not only related to making interventions in the digital space but educating on different aspects of young people's own sexuality. As humans, we are all born as sexual beings and have to develop our own sexual potential and identity. Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is the process of educating and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social dimensions of sexuality. It aims to provide people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values they need to achieve their health, well-being, and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own and others' well-being; and understand and protect their rights throughout their lives. CSE emphasises principles like respect, inclusiveness, non-discrimination, equality, empathy, responsibility, and reciprocity. It promotes healthy and good attitudes towards bodies, puberty, relationships, sex, and family life. It aids in the fight against grooming and/or the debunking of myths about gender-based violence (CESAGRAM, 2024). CSE helps to prepare children and young people for building and maintaining satisfactory and consensual (sexual) relationships, now and in the future (Bonjour & van der Vlugt, 2018). This approach stands on the right of all young people to be informed about their sexuality, sexual reproductive health, sexual relationships and all the implications that derive also in terms of violence (including OSEA), equality and mutual respect (Miedema et. al, 2020). Young people should learn the importance of respecting their own and others' boundaries to establish positive interactions and stay safe. Often, the messages conveyed, especially through social media, may "confuse" and leave individuals unsure about how to set their own limits in everyday situations: although they may "theoretically" know what permission is, they may take it "for granted". It is vital to investigate how we feel, how our bodies react, what sorts of thoughts we have, and how we communicate with and without words, both in "real" life and online.

However, in most countries, sexuality education is taught in schools and integrated into other topics such as biology, health, life skills education, and citizenship. Most programs educate participants about sexually transmitted illnesses, unintended pregnancy, abstinence, and contraceptive use. Gender norms, sexual variety, sexual coercion, and sexual pleasure are all issues that receive little attention (Bonjour & van der Vlugt, 2018). In Comprehensive Sexual Education, nonetheless, sexuality is intended as a pivotal element of personal growth, personality development and building up mutually consensual (sexual) relationships (Bonjour & van der Vlugt, 2018; Miedema et. al, 2020).

Because CSE does not treat sexuality topics only in terms of STIs and unwanted pregnancy, its impact has been noted also in the kid's perception of their body, their body ownership, communication and self-protection (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2020). This shows how CSE is rooted in the right to be informed on a holistic, comprehensive level, and how important it is also in preventing child sex abuse in the light of growing technologies that expose youth to violent and misleading images (Bonjour & van der Vlugt, 2018; Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2020; UNESCO, 2018). As a matter of fact, one of the key concepts of CSE, treats topics such as violence, consent, privacy and safe use of ICTs (UNESCO, 2018). UNESCO also emphasises a learner-centred

approach to CSE and collaborative learning practices within its programmes. Learner-centred techniques allow students to actively participate in the learning process and promote individual learning styles. Because learning can be viewed as a type of personal development, students are encouraged to employ reflective methods to critically think about their own lives (Bonjour & van der Vlugt, 2018). The 2030 Agenda and its worldwide Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call for action to ensure that no one is left behind, as well as the attainment of universal human rights and gender equality. The mobilisation of political commitment to achieve goals in education, gender equality, health, and well-being also presents an excellent opportunity to scale up existing or new multisectoral programs to offer CSE to children and young people everywhere (UNESCO, 2018).

Lastly, digital consent refers to sexual consent obtained via screens. Consent should be discussed constantly while communicating digitally, just as it is in real-life sexual encounters. Although you are not speaking face-to-face, you should constantly consider how your actions may affect the other person's feelings and keep a line of open communication with them. Not unexpectedly, learning to protect one's privacy is the first step toward independent Internet use. More than just safety, appropriate privacy management entails setting appropriate limits and respecting oneself and others. The right to privacy is also a duty, and it is one of a few of unquestionable ethical and behavioural principles (CESAGRAM, 2024). Some interesting and useful tools on CSE can be found below:

- CESAGRAM

The overall objective is to develop training for better exchange of knowledge, experience and good practice for professionals and develop tools for young people to recognise grooming and better protect themselves.

Website: [CESAGRAM](#)

- LOVE ACT

LoveAct responds to the lack of CSE programs around Europe and the consequent need to equip young people, families and educational staff with knowledge, skills, and means to prevent GBV from an early age, while preparing the ground for healthy relationships to flourish.

Website: [the Gender Talk](#)

4. Supporting child victims of OSEA

4.1 The psychological sphere of OSEA

OSEA possesses uncountable risks. Those risks can affect both the physical and psychological and moral well-being and dignity of young people, with consequences that can accompany them for years and affect their psyche in various ways.

From time to time there are many reports concerning the violation of the rights of children by adult internet users who, although they initiate contact with the child victim through the internet, manage to reach him/her in person and influence his/her daily life.

The psychological consequences of OSEA on children are quite complex, spanning from direct and indirect effects.

In the case of the 15-year-old girl who was sexually abused by the 54-year-old man, it is said to be a violation of her sexual dignity, a violation of her personal data and a violation of the child's inalienable right to safety. Psychological effects may include:

- **psychosocial** difficulties,
- **depressive** behaviour,
- inability to **concentrate**,
- lack of **appetite**,
- **self-harm** behaviour and/or thoughts,
- higher **anxiety** levels and even
- the appearance of **psychiatric symptoms**, symptoms which in any case reduce the child's functionality and can potentially cause even greater harm.
- **Mistrust** in adults or anyone (Sousa-Gomes et al, 2024)
- Attempts of **escaping** (Gambon et al, 2020)
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (Papalia et al, 2021)
- **Low self-esteem** and difficulty managing emotions
- Difficulty in establishing and maintaining **relationships**
- Risk of developmental delays
- Lack of interest and feelings of hopelessness
- Development of aggressive or delinquent behaviour
- Eating disorders
- Creation of **similar patterns of abuse** in the future: an increased likelihood of becoming abusers or being abused in future relationships.

So, what can we do as youth workers to shield and support children?

- **We need to learn to listen.** Active and empathetic listening is a skill that most adults have not mastered when it comes to meeting minors. We are excellent at giving instructions but poor at listening attentively to the child's experience, putting ourselves in the child's shoes and assessing their needs through their eyes.
- **Prevention** is the first and most important goal, as by arming a child with **information** about their rights and what constitutes abusive-neglectful and caring behaviour, we enable them to understand when something is wrong. And then reference persons are essential. If we don't talk to children in the 'good days', we won't talk to them in the time of crisis. After all, even our manner, our expressions and our mood when children talk to us play a very important role in whether they will continue to talk to us. Blaming and blaming lead children to experience feelings of guilt for situations that adults created and maintain.
- **Turn to the support of services.** Helplines for adults and minors, counselling and therapeutic services as well as the possibility to report incidents anonymously to authoritative and immediately responsive platforms play a crucial role in this level of protection of children.

4.2 Getting support

This section will be divided per country, and each country will describe an initiative or project on OSEA, resources to report cases or seek advice or help, and support mechanisms present in the area.

France/Martinique

Best practice		
	Title	Mouvement du Nid: A Best Practice in Supporting Victims of Sexual Exploitation
	Brief Description	Mouvement du Nid is an association supporting educators. As they play a critical role in identifying and supporting victims of sexual exploitation, whether online or offline the association provides them with a guide to recognize warning signs and give consistent guidance to victims and potential victims.
	Relevance and analysis of the potential for replicability	<i>Mouvement du Nid</i> stands out as the only association in Martinique specifically dedicated to supporting and assisting victims of prostitution. Their work is a model of best practices, addressing the complex needs of those who have experienced sexual exploitation. This distinction is not only due to the breadth of their services but also because of their unwavering commitment to providing holistic and compassionate care. Their team of social workers offers an inclusive and non-judgmental environment where victims can feel safe and supported. They provide a range of essential services, including: ● Free and unconditional listening and support, creating

		a space where victims are heard and validated without prejudice. ● Guidance in navigating administrative processes, assisting with legal documentation and helping individuals regularise their legal status. ● Job-seeking assistance, offering practical help in finding employment and understanding the social and professional norms of their new environment. ● Access to healthcare and psychological support, connecting individuals with medical and mental health professionals to address the trauma they have endured. These comprehensive interventions set a standard in the field, offering a model that other professionals, including educators, can draw upon when working with victims of sexual exploitation—whether online or in person. <i>Mouvement du Nid's</i> approach embodies a holistic, trauma-informed strategy, making them a benchmark in the fight against sexual exploitation. By drawing on their example, educators and other stakeholders can better understand the importance of comprehensive, empathetic support systems that address not only the immediate crisis but also the long-term recovery of victims.
	Source	https://mouvementdunid.org/mouvement-du-nid/delegations/martinique/
Resources	● Point de Contact, Resources designed to inform and raise awareness about inappropriate online content and behaviour: https://www.pointdecontact.net/disrupt/ ● Tools to combat cybersexism: https://www.stop-cybersexisme.com/ ● Awareness campaign and education toolkit #stopcyberviolence: https://stoplescyberviolences.ca/ressources-pedagogiques/niveau-pri	

	maire/
Support mechanisms	• For minors: Professionals from the Department, more precisely the ASE (aide sociale à l'enfance) which corresponds to the children protection service previously mentioned in the case study. ASE can combine multiple services such as the PJJ (judicial youth protection), shelters, day-care structures, detention centres for minors, foster care, etc. https://www.santeenfrance.fr/annuaire/23-aides-sociales-a-l-enfance-ase/dep:972 National emergency number for minors in danger: 119: free and accessible 24/7 • For young adults: For sexual and domestic abuse towards women: 3919 For disabled people: 3977 Associations that assist victims of sexual violence: → Mouvement du Nid → https://www.martinique.gouv.fr/Vous-etes/Association#!/particuliers/page/F2274 → Culture Égalité: they assist victims and especially women in systemic sexual and sexist violences through workshops, cultural activities, etc... → Union des Femmes Martinique: they assist victims of domestic violences whose sexual violences which can be prostitution even though the victim does not identify it as such. They support the victim through the whole process of the complaint and judicial journey. → ALEFPA for emergency shelters and social inclusion: https://ovifem.alefpa.fr/ → France Victimes Martinique, specialised in assisting any kind of violences: https://francevictimesmartinique.com → LAMEVI, an association for the victims of sexual assaults, especially

insects: <https://www.helloasso.com/associations/lamevi>

Greece

Best practice	Title	The Smile of the Child: Prevention and Awareness Raising among Children, Teachers, Parents and Guardians
	Brief Description	“The Smile of the Child” recognising the key role that school community plays in the field of prevention carries out on a daily basis interactive, experiential activities targeting students, teachers, parents and guardians. The interventions are carried out by a specialised team of psychologists of the Organization in kindergartens, primary schools and high schools nationwide. The main objectives of the interventions are to inform children about their rights and help them develop basic social skills against the risks of abuse, school violence and bullying, internet safety, child disappearances, hate speech. A team of psychologists: - Visit schools throughout Greece even in the most remote regions, as well as Greek schools abroad. - visit cities across the country with the Mobile Lab of Information, Education and Technology “Odysseas” carrying out interventions for students, teachers, parents and guardians. Based on age groups, the proper means are selected by the psychologists, namely: Social

		Stories, Tales, cross media tools, Interactive Educational Tools, Shadow-Puppet Theatre and Documentaries.
	Relevance and analysis of the potential for replicability	The action is being implemented by “The Smile of the Child” since 2009 within the framework of a memorandum of cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and in cooperation with School Counsellors, Health Education Teachers, Regions and Municipalities. Therefore, the aforementioned institutional collaboration is a prerequisite, but also an important dimension in the implementation of such activities and it should be taken into consideration, in case an Organization is interested in replicating the action. Another important element to be taken into account is that the request for a visit comes from the school and is not an initiative of the Organization. This means that it is important that any Organization that wishes to implement such activities, has the trust and recognition of the society and of the school community, in order to be asked to visit schools and directly intervene with children, especially on sensitive issues.
	Source	<u>Prevention and Awareness Raising - The Smile of the Child® (hamogelo.gr)</u>
Resources	- Smile Academy of Education & Training, an Academy operating both in person and virtually, which aims to develop skills, abilities, life attitudes and habits of young and old (<u>Smile Academy (hamogelo.gr)</u>) - CONVEY - Not a game: an investigative adventure into terrible crimes. Across 5 chapters, through mini-games, flashbacks and videos based	

	on real testimonies of violence survivors, you become the detective looking for the people responsible for the crimes committed against a child, a girl, a woman and a student, while your own history of violence as the detective comes to surface (CONVEY Not A Game) • «RealLifeStories» program: The general goal of the program is a theoretical presentation and analysis of topics related with violence, abuse, bullying, missing children and children rights in general, via storytelling and an interactive association with the narrator (Real life stories - Program for Primary and Secondary education students (hamogelo.gr)) • European Student Network YouSmile: within YouSmile school and universities students can participate in the YouSmile Action Plan, the Child Rights Team and the Children's Rights TV Spots. The overall objective of this example of pure child participation is to ensure that as many children as possible are aware of their rights and mostly of their right to participate in decision making processes (Εθελοντισμός για μαθητές YouSmile) • Social Experiment: In collaboration with student volunteers from YouSmile, 'The Smile of the Child' organisation conducted a survey on the risks of attracting minors through anonymous #chat platforms and social media applications (description of the experiment and alarming results “The Smile of the Child” together with student volunteers of YouSmile conducted a survey about the dangers of attracting minors through anonymous chat platforms and social media applications (hamogelo.gr))
Support mechanisms	• European Helpline for Children and Adolescents 116111 (European Helpline for Children and Adolescents 116111 - The Smile of the Child® (hamogelo.gr)) • Chat 1056 application (Chat 1056 application - With Chat 1056 we are offering a new method for children to comfortably, safely and privately commu (hamogelo.gr)) • CyberTipline Hellas (Cybertipline Hellas - If you know of a child whose rights are being violated we are here to help. (hamogelo.gr)) • CYBER ALERT 11188 (CYBERALERT – από τη Διεύθυνση Δίωξης

[Ηλεκτρονικού Εγκλήματος\)](#)

Italy

Best practice		
		LEAGUE
		The LEAGUE project addresses the further need of prevention and increased reporting of online child sexual abuse of boys aged 10-18. It contributed to enhancing the competences of the relevant organisations and authorities supporting the victims of such crime. The program will be developed into two main streams. The first one is going to consist of training programmes – international and national to train professionals working with minors to spotting signs of online child sexual abuse and to address such matters as well as potential prevention. The second line of activities will target the victims – boys aged between 10 and 18. To reach them, an Internet Platform will be created as well as a chatbot. The children from this target group will actively participate in their creation. These activities will guarantee high level of awareness that the project aims to achieve in order to enhance the prevention and reporting of online child sexual abuse of boys aged 10-18. The project produced the following resources: • Internet Platform; • Training material on identification, prevention and support strategies on online child sexual abuse for professional working with and for

		children; • Chatbot to offer understandable and accessible answers to different questions that boys may have on this issue;
	Limiting online sexual exploitation and abuse of children and minors	The project is crucial to enhance awareness among young people of online child sexual abuse and how to respond to it. Addressing the importance of educational staff, youth workers and adults in general is instrumental to create a dialogue between them and youth while also enriching youth's knowledge with risks of internet and sexual online abuse. The idea is applicable in schools, education centres, parents, teachers and other kinds of operators who work with children and minors.
		https://cesie.org/en/project/league/
Resources	• - CESIE's project training materials – LEAGUE, Limiting online sexual Exploitation and Abuse Gender based on Underaged boys by Educating experts: https://cesie.org/media/league-training-materials-en.pdf • - Platform to report anonymously the presence of child sexual abuse material online: https://stop-it.savethechildren.it/ • - Situation in Italy regarding the fight against OSEA: https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/2023-05/dati_polizia_po_stale.pdf • - Parent guide by Save The Children and the Police: https://www.commissariatodips.it/docs/guida-per-genitori.pdf • - Telefono Azzurro's Dossier on OSEA: <i>LA DIGNITÀ DEI BAMBINI NEL MONDO DIGITALE</i>	

	- Telefono Azzurro's form to report potentially dangerous websites for children: https://azzurro.it/clicca-e-segnala/#:~:text=Attraverso%20questo%20form%20C3%A8%20possibile%20segnalare%20la%20presenza
Support mechanisms	supportoscuole@generazioniconnesse.it - Support Line from Telefono Azzurro: 1.96.96 - Postal Police reporting form: https://www.commissariatodips.it/segnalazioni/segnala-online/index.html

Portugal

Best practice		
	Title	"Safer Internet Portugal"
	Brief Description	Safer Internet Portugal is a national initiative aimed at promoting safer use of the internet among children, young people, and their families. The program provides resources for online safety education, including tools to recognize and report online abuse. It is a collaborative effort between government agencies, NGOs, and private sectors, which organises workshops, awareness campaigns, and tools to empower youth in navigating the digital world safely.
	Relevance and analysis of the potential for replicability	This program is highly relevant because it targets a critical issue of online safety for children in the digital era. By involving multiple stakeholders (parents, educators, children), it creates a comprehensive support system. The initiative's focus on

		community-based learning and its digital tools make it easily replicable in other countries with similar internet usage challenges. In 2023, the Portuguese Association for Victim Support's Linha Internet Segura recorded 1,522 cases, with a notable rise in reports of online grooming 628 cases, sextortion 99 cases, and child sexual abuse content; of particular concern was the increase in cases involving self-produced child sexual abuse material, often obtained through adult manipulation and online grooming tactics. (Reference: https://apav.pt/apav_v3/index.php/pt/3392-estatisticas-apav-linha-internet-segura-2023)
	Source	Available at: https://www.internetsegura.pt/Missão e Objetivos Internet Segura
Resources	https://www.internetsegura.pt/recursos/all/all https://www.internetsegura.pt/sites/default/files/2024-10/parentalidade_digital_positiva_0.pdf https://www.internetsegura.pt/sites/default/files/2024-03/literacias_digital_ais_-_adolescentes-portugueses_0.pdf https://www.internetsegura.pt/sites/default/files/2023-03/cis-burla-rom_antica-2-1.pdf https://www.internetsegura.pt/sites/default/files/2023-02/handbook-for-teachers.pdf https://youtu.be/q9y0xn0CXuA	

Support mechanisms	• Instituto de Apoio à Criança (IAC): A support organisation offering assistance to children in crisis, including those facing online exploitation. Available at: https://www.iacrianca.pt/ • Comissão Nacional de Promoção dos Direitos e Proteção das Crianças e Jovens (CNPDPJ): This commission handles cases of child protection, including online exploitation and abuse. Available at: https://www.cnpdpj.gov.pt/ • APAV (Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima): A victim support organization that offers specialized services for children who are victims of online sexual abuse and exploitation. Available at: https://apav.pt/ • Safe Internet Hotline: National hotline to report any suspicious or harmful content related to online child exploitation. Available at: https://www.internetsegura.pt/ • The HEROES Project combats child sexual abuse and human trafficking through prevention, investigation, and victim support, led in Portugal by APAV.) https://heroes-fct.es/index.php?wlang=en • List of projects that APAV coordinate ou develop https://apav.pt/publiproj/
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Cyprus

Best practice		
	Title	CYberSafety: Promoting Safe Internet Practices for Youth in Cyprus
	Brief Description	The CYberSafety Project, led by the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, aims to promote internet safety among children, teenagers, educators, and parents through structured programs, interactive workshops, and educational resources. The project covers topics such as online grooming, cyberbullying, privacy protection, and safe online behaviour. In collaboration with local schools and the Ministry of Education, the CYberSafety project integrates digital literacy and internet safety into school curricula to empower students with the knowledge to navigate the digital world safely and responsibly.
	Relevance and analysis of the potential for replicability	The CYberSafety Project stands out for its multi-faceted approach, addressing internet safety across different age groups and focusing on both proactive and reactive measures to enhance digital literacy and safety among children, adolescents, and adults. Here are additional elements that highlight the project's relevance and potential for replicability: - Age-Appropriate Resources and Engagement: The project customises its resources for specific age groups, which enhances its effectiveness. Younger children are taught foundational concepts like online etiquette and privacy basics, while teenagers receive more detailed guidance on identifying grooming tactics, understanding cyberbullying, and protecting personal information. This structured age-based approach is replicable because it aligns with cognitive and developmental stages, allowing other regions to adapt the content to suit local

		education systems and cultural contexts. - Parental and Educator Involvement: CYberSafety includes parents and educators in the training process, equipping them with resources to discuss internet safety at home and in classrooms. By engaging adults who interact closely with children, the project creates a support network that reinforces digital safety behaviours across different environments. This involvement makes the project highly replicable, as other regions can benefit from similar strategies to build comprehensive community support. - Hands-On and Interactive Tools: The use of interactive tools, such as digital quizzes, games, and role-playing scenarios, helps children practise safe online behaviour in real-time, enhancing retention and application of the information. By incorporating these practical tools, other countries or regions could make internet safety education engaging and relatable. Interactive elements make the project scalable, especially as digital tools can be translated, culturally adapted, and scaled based on technological access. - Strong Institutional Collaboration: CYberSafety's partnership with the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, schools, and the Ministry of Education ensures wide accessibility and consistent messaging. This institutional support is key for replicability, as government involvement provides legitimacy, supports curriculum integration, and fosters widespread implementation. Countries with existing government-backed education programs can model similar partnerships. - Adaptability and Scalability: The flexibility of the CYberSafety Project means it can be scaled for diverse populations. The program can be tailored to urban and rural settings, different school levels, and various socio-economic backgrounds. By structuring it in
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		modular formats, the project's resources can easily be expanded or reduced based on community needs, which is a beneficial trait for replication in countries with varying levels of digital infrastructure. - Comprehensive Awareness Campaigns: The project also organises public awareness campaigns like Safer Internet Day, which enhances community involvement and spreads key messages about internet safety. These campaigns encourage broad community participation, which reinforces the project's goals and creates public accountability for protecting youth online. Many countries can adopt similar annual campaigns to raise awareness on a large scale. The combination of these elements makes the CYberSafety Project a strong, adaptable model that addresses the complexities of internet safety comprehensively, which enhances its potential for adoption in other regions facing similar digital safety challenges.
	Source	Cyprus Pedagogical Institute. <i>CYberSafety project</i> https://internetsafety.pi.ac.cy/
Resources	● CYberSafety Online Toolkit - Provides resources for students, parents, and educators on internet safety: https://internetsafety.pi.ac.cy/interactive-games/ ● European Safer Internet Day Event Materials - Includes presentations, videos, and activities from Safer Internet Day events in Cyprus: https://better-internet-for-kids.europa.eu/en/saferinternetday	

Support mechanisms	● CYberSafety Helpline (1480): Provides advice, support, and guidance for internet-related issues, including cases of online exploitation and abuse. Operated by the Cyprus Safer Internet Center, it is a key resource for reporting online threats and seeking support. https://internetsafety.pi.ac.cy/ ● Hope For Children CRC Policy Center: Offers support services, including counseling, legal guidance, and advocacy for victims of child abuse and exploitation. Operates the Children's House model for minor victims of sexual abuse, providing holistic support in a child-friendly environment. ○ Contact: +357 22 103234 ● Cyprus Police Cybercrime Unit: This specialised unit handles reports of online exploitation, grooming, and other cyber-related crimes targeting minors. It works with local organisations and provides investigation and immediate response services. ○ Contact: 00357 22808080. ● European Helpline for Children and Adolescents: A free and confidential helpline offering emotional support, advice, and referrals for children and adolescents dealing with internet safety concerns, bullying, and abuse. ○ Contact: 116111 ● Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (SPAVO): SPAVO operates a 24/7 helpline for individuals experiencing domestic violence, which includes sexual exploitation cases. They provide counselling and can connect victims with relevant support agencies. ○ Contact: 1440
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Belgium

Best practice		
	Title	Sexual Violence Support Centre
	Brief Description	Before the creation of Sexual Violence Care Centres[1], victims had to navigate the process on their own and were often supported only by family or friends, as their care largely depended on filing a complaint. To address this issue and in accordance with the Istanbul Convention [2], since 2017, nine Sexual Violence Care Centres have been established within hospitals across Belgium. Each centre offers integrated multidisciplinary services that work together to provide comprehensive care for victims of sexual violence. Now, victims can receive medical, psychological, and legal support all in one place, available 24/7[3]. To better address the specific needs of minors who are victims of sexual violence, a dedicated action plan for minors was adopted in 2021[4]. This was crucial as statistics from the centres show that since their inception, 8,230 victims have sought help, with 32% of them being minors at the time of admission. From October 2017 to December 2022[5], the centres admitted: • 13.4% of minors aged 0 to 12 years, • 18.5% of minors aged 13 to 17 years. The Sexual Violence Support Centre is accessible 24/7 to provide support to both adult and child victims of sexual violence. It offers comprehensive care, including immediate medical assistance, psychological support, and the option to undergo a forensic examination to collect evidence in case a complaint is filed.

		Services offered by the Centres include: • Medical care: Immediate evaluation and treatment of the physical, sexual, or reproductive consequences of the assault, including vaccinations if necessary. • Forensic examination: Documentation of injuries, collection of biological evidence, and preservation of these materials in case the victim chooses to file a complaint later. • Psychological support: Active listening, risk assessment for post-traumatic stress, and the possibility of follow-up care with a psychologist. • Filing a complaint: A specialised police inspector can take the victim's complaint at the centre, eliminating the need for the victim to go to a police station. The Centres bring together multidisciplinary teams, including gynaecologists, forensic nurses, social workers, psychologists, and trained police inspectors, ensuring that victims receive holistic and tailored care. The centre aims to provide a safe environment and swift assistance, promoting the recovery of victims. [1] Centre de prise en charge des violences sexuelles in French ; Zorgcentra na seksueel geweld in Dutch. [2] <u>Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violences</u>, CETS No. 210, Article 22. [3] Roelandt, A. (2022). La lutte contre les violences
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		sexuelles basées sur le genre: Focus sur la prise en charge des mineurs victimes de violences sexuelles. <i>Le Journal du droit des jeunes</i>, 411, p. 223. [4] Institut pour l'égalité des femmes et des hommes. (2021). <u><i>Plan d'action pour les victimes mineures au sein des centres de prise en charge des violences sexuelles</i></u>. [5] CPVS. (n.d.). <u><i>Les Centres de Prise en charge des Violences Sexuelles en chiffres</i></u>.
	Relevance and analysis of the potential for replicability	Replicating the Sexual Violence Support Centre model across EU Member States is recommended due to its holistic, survivor-centred approach, which integrates healthcare, psychological support, and law enforcement services. This model not only helps prevent re-traumatization but also ensures timely interventions for victims. Notably, there are strong parallels between the Sexual Violence Support Centre and the <i>Barnahus</i> model, particularly in their multidisciplinary support for survivors. Sexual Violence Centres could learn from <i>Barnahus</i> by adapting their services more specifically to the needs of children, while <i>Barnahus</i> could benefit from the Sexual Violence Support Centre practice of being embedded in regular hospitals with 24/7 accessibility. This accessibility makes the Sexual Violence Support Centre model especially valuable. However, challenges remain, including the need for robust multi sectoral coordination, adequate funding, and tailoring the model to fit local legal and cultural contexts. Despite these hurdles, the success of Sexual Violence Support Centre in Belgium highlights its potential for broader implementation across the EU, particularly in the context of increasing efforts to address gender-based violence.
	Source	<u>Home page</u> of the Sexual Violence Care Centres. Roelandt, A. (2022). La lutte contre les violences sexuelles basées sur le genre: Focus sur la prise en

	charge des mineurs victimes de violences sexuelles. <i>Le Journal du droit des jeunes</i>, 411. Institut pour l'égalité des femmes et des hommes. (2021). Plan d'action pour les victimes mineures au sein des centres de prise en charge des violences sexuelles.
Resources	- Child Focus (2024), Catalogue du matériel de prévention, 2024[1]. - Association Parole d'enfants (s.d.), L'abus sexuel à l'encontre des enfants : petit dictionnaire des idées reçues. - Child Focus (2023), GrooMix. - O'Yes (2023), Guide pour l'EVRAS : guidelines and learning for those involved in Relational, Affective and Sexual Life Education in schools, in particular the 'Information and Communication Technologies – Media Literacy' section. - Défense des enfants Belgique (2012), Les violences sexuelles contre les enfants, module pédagogique n°2012/03. - The Betternet Center (the Belgian Safer Internet Center) provides a range of educational resources and training for professionals, carefully selected by the Betterinternet partners. - Action Médias Jeunes, Accompagner les jeunes sur les réseaux sociaux. - Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation aux Médias, Comment le web influence-t-il la vie affective et sexuelle des jeunes? - Child Focus, Dossier pédagogique Sexting@school. - Arts nomades, #Vu, a Theater play and educational file on problematic sexting and the impact it can have on young people who experience it. - Mediawijs, Alles over sexting. - Mediawijs, EDUbox Sexting. - Veilig Online, Online relaties en seksualiteit.

	[1] The tools available are categorised by target audience (children, youth, parents, and professionals) and by thematic (sexting, sexual extortion, prevention of adolescent pimp victims, grooming).
Support mechanism	Support mechanisms at national level Centre de Prise en Charge des Violences Sexuelles / Zorgcentrum na Seksueel Geweld Provides multidisciplinary care for victims of sexual violence, offering medical, psychological help, and legal assistance. Victims can choose the services they need. Available 24/7 for immediate assistance after an incident. Contact information: cpvs@iefh.belgique.be Website: https://cpvs.belgium.be/fr and https://zsq.belgium.be/nl Child Focus Foundation for Missing and Sexually Exploited Children offering assistance for minors experiencing online abuse. Provides a reporting form for child sexual abuse images, with a specialized team to analyze and act on them. Contact information: 116 000 or 116000@childfocus.org Website: https://childfocus.be/fr-be/ Cybersquad An online space for young people to ask questions and share experiences related to the internet and social media, with the guidance of Child Focus professionals. Anonymous chat available. Website: https://cybersquad.be/ and https://cybersquad.be/nl/ Chat: https://cybersquad.be/chat/ Télé-Accueil/Tele-Onthaal Free, anonymous listening service via hotlines: Website: https://tele-accueil.be/ and https://www.tele-onthaal.be/

	Contact: 106 (Dutch-speaking) and 107 (French-speaking) • Betternet Center Belgian Safer Internet Center promoting safer online environments for children. Offers tools and resources, a helpline, and reporting for online safety issues. Website: https://betternet.be/ • Family Planning Centers Centers across Belgium offering support on sexuality, contraception, and sexual violence prevention [1]. • Belgian Institute for the Equality of Women and Men Offers legal advice and support for victims of offline and online sexual violence. Contact via free number (0800/12 800), email, or online form. Website: https://iqvm-iefh.belgium.be/fr and https://iqvm-iefh.belgium.be/nl Reporting form: https://digital.belgium.be/iaf/hil/iqvm/complaint/ • Judicial Assistance Services Provides legal support through first-line (basic legal advice) and second line (court representation) aid, ensuring access to legal services for all income levels. Website: https://avocats.be/fr/tout-savoir/la-recherche-dun-premier-conseil and https://www.ordevanvlaamsebalies.be/nl/kennisbank/toegang-tot-het-recht Support mechanisms in the French Community of Belgium (Wallonia and Brussels)
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	• Maintenantjenparle.be Chat service for victims of sexual assault, operated by SOS Enfants Namur. Available Monday to Friday, 6 PM to 9 PM. <i>Website:</i> https://www.maintenantjenparle.be/ • SOS Enfants A network providing free assistance to child abuse victims, with 14 centers in Wallonia and Brussels. Includes medical, psychological, and legal experts. <i>Website of the Federation:</i> http://www.federationsosenfants.be/ • 103 Ecoute-Enfants Free listening service for children and teenagers via phone. Covers a wide range of topics, including sexual abuse. <i>Website:</i> https://www.103ecoute.be/ Contact: 103 Supports mechanisms in the Flemish Community of Belgium (Flanders and Brussels) • Nupraatikerover.be Chat service for minors, operated by Child Abuse Confidential Centers in Flanders and Brussels. Offers advice on child abuse, neglect, and family issues. <i>Website:</i> https://www.nupraatikerover.be/ • Trefpunt Zelfhulp (Peer Support Groups) Provides peer support to help individuals process trauma. <i>Website:</i> https://www.zelfhulp.be/ Contact: trefpunt.zelfhulp@kuleuven.be and 016 33 00 44
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	Contact form: https://www.zelfhulp.be/contact#contactformulier • Awel Anonymous, free chat service for children and young people in Flanders. Contact via phone or online. Website: https://awel.be/ Contact form: https://awel.be/contacteer-ons Contact: 102 • Centre for General Welfare (CAW) Aids with welfare-related issues, including victim support for abuse and violence. Contact CAW for emotional and administrative support. Website: https://www.caw.be/ Contact: 0800 13 500 Contact form: https://www.caw.be/contacteer-ons/mail/ • Vertrouwenscentrum Kindermishandeling (Child Abuse Trust Center) Offers support for child abuse cases in Flanders and Brussels with multidisciplinary teams to stop violence and ensure safety. Website: https://www.vertrouwenscentrum-kindermishandeling.be/ • 1712 Helpline Flemish helpline for questions about violence, abuse, and child abuse, offering support via phone, chat, or email. Website: https://www.1712.be/en/call-1712 Contact: 1712
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[1] Several federations of Family Planning Centers can be contacted: Fédération Laïque de Centres de Planning Familial, Fédération Pluraliste des Centres de Planning Familial (FCPPF), Fédération des Centres de Planning et Consultations (FCPC), Fédération des Centres de Planning familial des FPS and Centrum voor Algemeen Welzijnswerk.

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