



Delivering on a Security Union: Questions and Answers

Brussels, 24 July 2020

EU strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse

Why is the Commission putting forward this strategy?

The fight against child sexual abuse is a priority for the EU. Child sexual abuse is more acute during the pandemic, as both children and perpetrators spend more time online.

A dramatic increase in child sexual abuse has been detected in the EU in recent years. The US [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#) notes an increase in the EU from 23,000 reports of child sexual abuse online in 2010 to more than 725,000 in 2019, which included more than 3 million images and videos. A similar increase has occurred globally: from 1 million reports in 2010 to almost 17 million in 2019, including nearly 70 million images and videos. A vast majority of these reports originated in electronic communications. According to the [Internet Watch Foundation](#), the EU has become the largest host of child sexual abuse material globally.

This EU strategy presents a framework to respond in a comprehensive way to the increasing threat of child sexual abuse, both in its **online and offline** form. This strategy will be the reference framework for EU action in the fight against these crimes in the next 5 years.

The strategy responds to the calls for concrete action from citizens, the European Parliament, and the Council. At global level, stakeholders have called for stronger approach in multiple fora, in particular at the [December 2019 summit of the WePROTECT Global Alliance to End Child Sexual Exploitation Online](#).

What are the core actions under the strategy?

The strategy sets out 8 initiatives:

1. Ensuring complete implementation of current legislation (Directive 2011/93/EU);
2. Ensuring that EU legislation enables an effective response;
3. Identifying legislative gaps, best practices and priority actions;
4. Strengthening law enforcement efforts at national and EU level;
5. Enabling Member States to better protect children through prevention;
6. A European centre to prevent and counter child sexual abuse;
7. Galvanising industry efforts to ensure the protection of children in their products; and
8. Improving protection of children globally through multi-stakeholder cooperation.

How would a new European Centre to prevent and counter child sexual abuse work?

A new European Centre would **provide support to Member States** in the fight against child sexual abuse and ensure **coordination** to maximise efforts in three areas:

- **Support to law enforcement:** the Centre would receive reports in relation to child sexual abuse in the EU from companies, and when relevant forward these to law enforcement for action. It would increase accountability and transparency by helping ensure that there is no erroneous takedown or report of legitimate content and by receiving and addressing complaints from users who feel that their content was mistakenly removed.
- **Prevention:** supporting Member States and facilitating coordination, the Centre would become a hub for connecting, developing and disseminating research and expertise. It would foster dialogue among stakeholders, and provide input to policy-makers at national and EU level.
- **Assistance to victims:** national authorities and global experts would work together in order to ensure that victims receive appropriate assistance, including with the creation of research to support evidence-based policy on victim support. The Centre would also support victims in their efforts to remove their images and videos to safeguard their privacy, also through proactive search of materials and notification to the companies.

The Centre would build on best practices and lessons learned from similar initiatives around the world,

such as the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) in the US, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection and the Australian Centre for Child Exploitation.

When will the European Centre to prevent and counter child sexual abuse be established?

The Commission will carry out an impact assessment, with a study to be launched immediately, to identify the best way forward in possibly establishing the centre. The Commission will work closely with the European Parliament and Member States to explore the various implementation options, including making use of existing structures for the centre's functions where appropriate. This preparatory work will be carried out with the scope to maximise the centre's added-value, effectiveness, and sustainability.

How will the prevention network operate?

The prevention network will allow practitioners and researchers from across Europe to support Member States by creating a virtuous cycle of practice to research and research to practice. The network will follow a **scientific approach to prevention**. The network will have a strong focus on prevention programmes for offenders and for people who fear that they may offend, as this is the area Member States struggle the most. Victims' perspectives and views would also be brought into the network's work. The network will also support Member States' prevention efforts in relation to organisations that work with children and in **raising awareness** by creating focused **media campaigns and training materials**.

Is end-to-end encryption an obstacle in fighting child sexual abuse online?

The introduction of end-to-end encryption, while beneficial in ensuring privacy and security of communications, also facilitates the access to secure channels for perpetrators where they can hide their actions from law enforcement, such as trading images and videos. The use of encryption for criminal purposes needs to be addressed through solutions which could allow companies to detect and report child sexual abuse in end-to-end encrypted electronic communications. Any solution would need to ensure both the privacy of communications and the protection of children from sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, as well as the protection of the privacy of the children depicted in the child sexual abuse material.

Under the EU Internet Forum, the Commission has launched an expert process with industry to map and preliminarily assess, by the end of 2020, possible technical solutions to detect and report child sexual abuse in end-to-end encrypted electronic communications, and to address regulatory and operational challenges and opportunities in the fight against these crimes.

How will this strategy build on previous work in the field?

For more than 20 years, the EU has been providing funding, supporting dialogue with stakeholders and contributing to the legal framework for a safer online environment for children and young people. No single actor alone can defeat the crime of child sexual abuse: cooperation is key at EU and international level to make the best use of synergies as well as sharing experiences and best practices. Only a wide and complementary range of technical and legal measures can make this fight more effective and lead to a more integrated and better-coordinated approach. In particular, the new proposed strategy complements the [European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children](#).

How does this initiative link to the Digital Services Act?

As announced in the President von der Leyen's political guidelines and the [Communication on Shaping Europe's Digital Future](#), the [Digital Services Act](#) will upgrade the safety and liability rules for online platforms and other digital services. A [public consultation](#) is currently open to seek feedback from all stakeholders. The Commission will decide after this consultation on the most appropriate way forward, including the extent to which sector specific issues should be covered.

EU Agenda and Action Plan on Drugs 2021-2025

What will be the priorities when it comes to tackling illicit drugs?

The EU Agenda on Drugs sets out the political framework for the EU's drugs policy over the next 5 years and aims to guide Member States in achieving improved protection for citizens in the face of the complex challenges posed by illicit drugs.

It puts forward a science-led, evidence-based and multidisciplinary approach, covering both drug demand and drug supply reduction.

The Agenda identifies 8 strategic priorities related to security, prevention and health:

1. Disrupting and dismantling major high-risk drug-related organised crime groups operating in EU Member States and addressing links with other security threats;
2. Increasing detection of illicit trafficking of drugs and drug precursors at EU points of entry and

exit;

3. Increasing effective monitoring of logistical and digital channels exploited for medium and small-volume drug distribution and increasing seizures of illicit substances smuggled through these channels in close cooperation with the private sector;
4. Dismantling drug production and processing, preventing the diversion and trafficking of drug precursors for illicit drug production, and eradicating illegal cultivation;
5. Preventing the uptake of drugs, enhancing crime prevention, and raising awareness of the adverse effects of drugs on citizens and communities;
6. Enhancing access to treatment options for people who experience harm from substance use;
7. Increasing the efficiency of risk and harm reduction interventions to protect the health of drug users and the public;
8. Developing a balanced intervention on drugs use in prisons (reduce demand and restrict supply).

The Action Plan accompanying the Agenda sets out concrete measures for implementing these priorities.

The Commission will monitor the progress made in implementing the Agenda and Action Plan, based on performance indicators.

What is new in the EU Agenda on Drugs?

The EU Agenda and Action Plan on Drugs address the **increased poly-criminality of organised crime groups** and their adaptive ways of operating, the **role of the EU as a producer and exporter of drugs**, the increased levels of **violence and corruption** that enable the drug trade, **technological enablers** such as darknet marketplaces, cryptocurrencies and encryption technology for buying/selling drugs, **new patterns** of drug consumption between young people and the ageing population, as well as **gender differences**, and **social and environmental effects**.

The Agenda also covers indirect impacts of drug markets, such as environmental aspects related to the illegal dumping of chemicals resulting from domestic drug production. It takes into consideration the gender perspective, identifying and addressing the barriers that women face seeking drug treatment. It looks at the issues of driving under the influence of drugs, and drugs use in prisons.

The Agenda also simplifies monitoring of progress by introducing performance indicators linked to each priority.

Why tackle drug availability and counter drug trafficking at EU level?

Drug markets and organised crime groups know no borders, calling for action at EU level to address their impacts on security and health. The EU Agenda and Action Plan on Drugs promote coordination between law enforcement, judiciary, customs and border control authorities across borders; ensure the monitoring of Internet and darknet marketplaces for drugs; and address the links with other EU security threats such as trafficking in human beings and terrorism. Cooperation between the EU, third countries and regions, and international organisations is also crucial, and the EU should speak with one voice in international fora, advocating for an evidence-based, integrated and balanced approach.

2020-2025 EU Action plan on firearms trafficking

Why is a new action plan needed?

Since 2009, 23 mass shootings have killed 341 people in Europe. Extreme-right activists are increasingly under the limelight for accumulating such weapons. At the same time, 35 million illegal firearms are estimated to be in the hands of civilians in the EU. Information is patchy; the knowledge of the threat does not rely on solid, comparable data. In an area without internal borders, the EU has played an active part against this threat. However, legal control of firearms, police cooperation against trafficking and systematic investigations all need to be improved. New threats and ways of operating that need to be addressed include:

- Smuggling of firearms and firearms parts into the EU through fast parcels;
- Smuggling by cars and coaches, known as 'ant-trade';
- Imports and intra-EU transfers of alarm and signal weapons that can be easily converted into lethal firearms;
- Remaining legislative discrepancies between Member States, with some weapons still being freely available (such as 'Flobert' weapons initially designed for 'living-room' shooting)
- Imports of semi-finished weapons components to be assembled at home and 3D printing of firearms (for polymer or even metallic parts).

What is new, compared to the previous action plans?

The Commission proposes to define performance indicators for the EU and Member States, inspired by best practice developed by Western Balkan partners. They notably relate to the conformity of national legislation with EU law, to the number of seizures of firearms, the number of prosecutions and convictions for firearms trafficking, the number of export licences and post-shipment checks, the number of established firearms focal points, the number of weapons surrendered, legalised, deactivated or destroyed, etc.

With respect to cooperation between the EU and south-east Europe, the Commission proposes a streamlined structure of coordination, for countries and international organisations to support activities in south-east Europe. This should avoid some of the existing overlaps, and ensure better information of all partners.

Is there an overlap between this Action Plan and the Western Balkans 'Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of small and light weapons and their ammunition until 2024'?

No. This Action Plan integrates into the EU framework the intergovernmental initiative of the 2018 Western Balkans Roadmap. This integration responds to a strong request from all partners (see notably Council Conclusions of 5 June 2020 "on enhancing cooperation with Western Balkans partners in the field of migration and security"). It provides EU-level legitimacy to this initiative and creates an opportunity to simplify processes and increase coordination of all players. It also underlines the importance of firearms trafficking for the EU internal security, going beyond foreign policy approaches. This Action Plan does not affect the way Western Balkans partners have started to implement the Roadmap and report on it, which remains unchanged.

For More Information

[Press release](#): EU Security Union Strategy: connecting the dots in a new security ecosystem

[Press release](#): Delivering on a Security Union: initiatives to fight child sexual abuse, drugs and illegal firearms

[Communication](#) on the EU Security Union Strategy

[Communication](#) on the EU strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse

[Communication](#) on the EU Agenda and Action Plan on Drugs 2021-2025

[Communication](#) on the 2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking

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