



Committee: UNICEF

Topic: Establishing International Standards for Social Media Platforms to Prevent Child Grooming.

Written By:

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I. Committee Background:

The United Nations Children's Fund is a decentralized, intergovernmental agency established in 1946, in the aftermath of World War II, which works to protect the rights of every child, especially the most disadvantaged and those hardest to reach, across more than 190 countries and territories. Funded entirely through voluntary contributions from millions of people around the world, partners in government, civil society and the private sector, it provides and advocates for education, health and nutrition services; protects children from violence and abuse; brings clean water and sanitation to those in need; and keeps them safe from climate change and disease, invariably following the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international legal framework adopted by world leaders in 1989 to preserve and fulfill children's rights. Furthermore, UNICEF is the world's largest provider of vaccines, as well as the agency responsible for running the world's largest humanitarian warehouse. In matters of logistics, its executive board reviews UNICEF activities and approves its policies, country programmes and budgets. It comprises 36 members, representing the five regional groups of Member States at the United Nations, whose work is coordinated by the Bureau, consisting of the President and four Vice-Presidents, each officer representing one of the five regional groups. All moved to strive to establish children's rights as enduring ethical principles and international standards of behaviour towards children (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], n.d.).

II. Topic History:

Online grooming is a growing international problem as children are engaging with social media and technology more and more. Grooming is a practice in which an adult establishes a relationship of trust with a child or adolescent with the ultimate goal



of sexually abusing them (UNICEF, 2026). It can start innocently on chat rooms, social media sites, online gaming, or other services. Children, their parents, and moderators can find it hard to identify predatory behavior. According to an article by UNICEF dated September 3, 2026, 20 million children in 21 countries between the ages of 12-17 experienced at least one form of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation or abuse in one year. Over half of the cases occurred on mainstream social media sites which shows the necessity of improved security.

The first documented and widely recognized cases of internet-initiated child grooming emerged in police reports and public awareness during the late 1990s and early 2000s, as early chat rooms, instant messaging platforms, and online services expanded. Thus, in 1998, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children established its CyberTipline to receive reports of suspected child exploitation (NCMEC, 2026), and the United States established its Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force program to strengthen law-enforcement responses to technology-facilitated crimes against children. Nonetheless, disgraces like the abduction of Alicia Kozakiewicz in 2002, who was contacted and groomed online on a Yahoo chat, still took place.

Moreover, moving into 2010-2019, smartphones, social networking platforms, video-sharing services, and messaging apps changed how children interacted online. Grooming was no longer limited to public chat rooms; communication could move into private messages and less visible spaces. During this period, public awareness grew around fake identities, emotional manipulation, requests for sexual images, and the use of threats to control victims. Online safety education and digital investigations became increasingly important.

Consequently, the COVID-19 pandemic led many children to spend more time online for education, entertainment, and social interaction, with an 82% rise in online grooming crimes against children reported in that period (NSPCC, 2023, as cited in Save the Children, 2024). This increased concern about children's exposure to online exploitation. Organizations such as UNICEF and NCMEC emphasized prevention, reporting, and support for victims. Gaming platforms, social media, and video communication services received particular attention because they allowed people to communicate across geographical boundaries.

In 2024, research released by Save the Children and Western Sydney University, highlighted that over six in 10 children with access to the internet interact



with "unknown others" daily despite concerns about online grooming. A year later, in the United States, NCMEC reported more than 1.4 million reports of online enticement, an increase of 158% from 2024. On the other hand, Australia, at the end of 2025, became the first nation in the world to ban social-media accounts for children under 16, on the basis that the risks from the content they share far outweighs the potential benefits. Several other countries, including Malaysia, the UK, France and Canada, look set to follow Australia's lead, preparing regulations and laws for similar bans or restrictions (UNICEF, 2026).

Nowadays, pressing challenges still remain, like identifying suspicious messages and connections prior to the child being subjected to sexual exploitation since individuals who groom children may use fictitious names in order to mask their identities and threaten children with exposure of their personal details or force them to change communication to other forums. Additionally, the increasing use of encryption technologies, which is difficult for monitoring but necessary for privacy, may hinder investigations and raise further controversies. According to the Global Threat Assessment 2025 produced by WeProtect Global Alliance, such risks as encrypted communications and the use of rapidly developing technologies pose a threat to the current child protection system. Finally, organisations that advocate for children report that predators can use artificial intelligence to analyse a child's online behaviour, emotional state, and interests to tailor their grooming strategy. AI is also enabling offenders to generate explicit fake images of real children, driving a new form of sexual extortion.

Therefore, legal and technological responses continue to develop, including improved reporting requirements, platform safety measures, and investigations involving digital evidence. In physical places, greater awareness, education, and cooperation between families, institutions, and law enforcement prevail indispensable to prevent online grooming.

III. Current Issues

In the **United States**, the problem of online grooming via social media, instant messaging, and video gaming is still acute. According to the National Center of



Missing & Exploited Children, the reports of online enticement of children for sexual purposes increased by 158% compared to the previous year, reaching to over 1.4 million in 2025 (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2026). The United States has robust reporting mechanisms, such as the CyberTipline, and addressing online sexual exploitation and enticement of minors is covered by the legislation. In particular, in 2024, the REPORT Act was enacted, amending the existing law and requiring the reporting of online enticement and child sex trafficking by electronic service providers. Nevertheless, the rising rates of reports, online anonymity, and the development of artificial intelligence impede investigations and prevent appropriate action (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2026).

The United Kingdom has implemented the Online Safety Act 2023 concerning children's safety. This law requires social media companies and other platforms to check risks, protect minors against illegal content, and report it. Moreover, new safety measures for children were enforced from July 2025 (UK Government, 2025). They relate to age verification and illegal material. Ofcom, the UK communications regulator, will monitor and ensure that platforms adopt these steps. However, the primary challenges relate to allowing companies to recognize problematic interactions and respond appropriately (UK Government, 2025). For instance, it should be prevented that adults may contact children inappropriately and groom them. Overall, the effectiveness will be based on how the platforms and regulators can collaborate and ensure safety.

Germany is governed by the European Union legislation concerning legal online services and child protection, notably the Digital Services Act, and the European Commission's 2025 guidelines on the prevention of grooming and other risks associated with internet services. Consequently, Germany has to guarantee that digital platforms available to children address grooming appropriately (European Commission, 2025). However, online grooming often involves numerous digital services and jurisdictions that limit the ability of competent authorities to investigate and pursue legal actions if data are hosted on servers located in a foreign state. Another problem is the balancing of the protective function and the right to privacy and free communication. Effective prevention of grooming requires close cooperation



between Germany, the European Union, and private online service operators (European Commission, 2025).

While **Canada** has implemented various criminal laws and regulations on the luring and sexual exploitation of children through online means, such as Section 172.1 of the Criminal Code, there has been an ongoing debate on the responsibility of social media companies to mitigate the risks and harms associated with the issue. In order to address the controversy, the Canadian government introduced Bill C-34, the Safe Social Media Act, in June 2026. The bill aims to impose new safety obligations on social media platforms, as well as the artificial intelligence chatbot industry, thus establishing requirements of risk mitigation, reporting, and protection of children. Notably, the Safe Social Media Act bill was introduced as legislation, which means that its provisions should not be conflated with the aforementioned criminal law and regulations, such as Section 172.1 of the Criminal Code. The latest step taken by the Canadian government in the fight against online child exploitation underscores the challenge of balancing between the prevention obligations of private entities and the existing criminal laws and enforcement mechanisms (Government of Canada, 2026).

France addresses the online safety of minors via both national legislation and the European Union's regulatory framework. The latter is manifested in the EU Digital Services Act, which imposes certain obligations for online platforms, while guidelines published by the European Commission in July 2025 outline measures to prevent online grooming as well as other risks. They also promote child-friendly online platforms and services through the encouragement of their development and design choices. Still, the detection of grooming needs improved tools for identifying private interactions as abusive, mechanisms to allow children to report them, and inter-agency cooperation to investigate and prosecute offenders who may operate from jurisdictions outside France. Thus, while France engages in the European regulatory framework, the prevention of online exploitation requires further policy efforts at the national level (European Commission, 2025).

Mexico views grooming as a threat to children and adolescents who use social networks, messengers, or other online services at risk. The authorities urge offenders to entice children and adolescents by false identities on the web, establishing contact



with them and striving to exploit or sexually assault them. According to the National System for Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents (SIPINNA), as of June 2026, the Disrupting Harm Mexico study revealed that 13% of Mexican children and adolescents who used the Internet in 2023 and 2024 fell victim to technology-facilitated sexual exploitation or abuse (Government of Mexico, 2026). Additionally, the Mexican presidency published a decree in October 2026, which required social media to remove specific content harmful to children from their platforms, which had not yet been published in the Official Gazette when the decree was announced. Indeed, such preventative measures, as well as the availability of reporting mechanisms and responsibility of social media in case of violations, are needed.

IV. United Nations Action

The United Nations works to protect children and young people through some initiatives. The International Telecommunication Union created the COP (Child Online Protection) initiative to raise awareness about the online risks and it provides guidelines for companies and educators.

The UN also helps young people to learn how to recognize reliable information online and encourages social media platforms to be honest and responsible, as an example, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child published General Comment No. 25 in 2021, explaining how children's rights apply in the digital environment and calling on governments to protect children from online violence, exploitation, and abuse.

V. Essential Questions:

1. How has human trafficking changed through history?
2. What actions have UNICEF taken to prevent child grooming on the Internet?
3. What measures should social media platforms implement to prevent child grooming in digital environments?
4. What international laws currently focus on child protection?
5. What factors make children vulnerable to online grooming, and what are its consequences?



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