The escalating threat of AI-generated child sexual abuse material

The spread of AI-generated child sexual abuse material presents a grave and escalating threat, amplifying the reach and impact of already horrific crimes. Offenders use AI to generate criminal content representing abuse and exploitation of children – often featuring very realistic images of young children and extreme sexual scenarios - according to the Internet Watch Foundation. 'Nudifying' apps, which use AI to 'undress' images of children, are easily accessible.

AI-generated imagery also has a terrifying potential to scale rapidly, introducing **new complexities into the fight against child sexual abuse**. These tools contribute to the normalisation of child sexual abuse material and increase dangers to children. 40% of offenders have sought contact with a child after viewing child sexual abuse material, and the most convincing AI CSAM is visually indistinguishable from real CSAM. In addition, images of known victims of child sexual abuse are used to create new content depicting them in different scenarios. They also provide new possibilities for offenders to groom and coerce children. **For survivors, seeing images of their abuse continue to circulate and be exploited online is deeply distressing, as it hinders their ability to heal and move forward from their trauma.**

This is why the EU needs urgent, robust legislation that **criminalises the creation and distribution of AI-generated child sexual abuse material**. **Tech-neutral** legislation is vital to ensure that these laws are able to adapt as technology evolves.

Companies must prioritise **safety by design** — embedding protective measures directly into their platforms and technologies when they are being created. Otherwise AI will continue to be weaponized to exploit vulnerable children.

The stakes are high, and legislation must reflect the urgency of protecting children in the digital age.