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Internet accessibility and digital vulnerabilities have increased over the last decade, especially for children. It is estimated that around the world, a child goes online for the first time every half-second.[32] The growing number of Internet users has resulted in a global rise of potential cybercrime victims and cybercriminals, as predicted by UNODC.[33] Navigating these less-regulated spaces can be difficult and destabilizing for children, caretakers and parents alike if prevention and countering measures, including reporting mechanisms and reparation measures, are not fully established and made available at the institutional level. In this context, gender and age are vulnerability factors for the victimization of children in cyberspace.

Children, in particular girls, are more likely to become victims of certain types of cyber-enabled and cyber-dependent crimes, in particular online harassment, child trafficking, and child sexual exploitation and abuse. Children can also be recruited by organized criminal and armed groups, including terrorist groups, using information and communication technology (ICT).

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is a serious form of violence against children that can only occur by means of ICT.

Violence against children in cyberspace is an extremely complex crime to handle, as:

- Child victims, offenders, and data or systems harming children may exist in different jurisdictions.
- Perpetrators globally exploit the lack of regulations, utilize anonymization techniques, and capitalize on the accessibility of the web, enabling them to operate with impunity.
- The majority of elements of evidence relating to cyber-dependent and cyber-enabled crimes are digital and their extraction, collection and analysis require specialized techniques.
- Member States lacking technical tools and specialist capabilities, or frameworks cannot respond to the rapidly changing online environment.

[32] See UNICEF, "Protecting children online: every child must be protected from violence, exploitation and abuse on the Internet", www.unicef.org/protection/violence-against-children-online.

[33] See UNODC, "Cybercrime and COVID19: risks and responses", 14 April 2020.

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The current nature and scale of this phenomenon is unprecedented and represents a serious threat to public health and security. The justice system plays a key role in addressing crime and violence committed against children via ICT. It has the ability to offer protection to child victims of violence and can create a dissuasive effect by investigating and prosecuting incidents of violence against children.[34] But the ecosystem of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is complex and there is a need to also enhance accountability of internet service providers that host illegal content of CSAM.

To ensure effective prevention of and responses to violence against children in cyberspace, the Strategy will bring together a range of stakeholders to:

- Create specialized knowledge on the risks of online crime and violence against children and disseminate it broadly as possible thus empowering communities and children to act as agents in their own protection;[35]
- Encourage public-private partnerships supporting the prevention of and responses to violence against children, especially in relation to online child exploitation and abuse; [36]
- Strengthen global and national normative frameworks to increase the protection of children from cyber-enabled and cyber-dependent crime, and to enhance assistance for child victims through a survivor-centred approach;
- Continue to support the development of sound policy on the topic in intergovernmental fora.

[34] A/RES/69/172, Part Two.

[35] This action will build on the findings and recommendations of the SRSG-VAC to the HRC (March 2023), which focuses on violence against children in the digital environment.

[36] Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Office of the Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Tech against Trafficking, "Policy responses to technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings: Analysis of current approaches and considerations for moving forward" (Vienna, 2022), p. 3.