

A person wearing a dark hoodie is centered in the foreground, their face obscured by shadow. The background is a dark, industrial interior with visible structural beams and some distant light sources, creating a somber and mysterious atmosphere.

18 November

**European Day on the Protection of Children
against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse***

* All case studies included in this brochure are based on the experience of the organization's beneficiaries. Any resemblance to other persons or facts are purely coincidental.

Which are the forms of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children facilitated by information and communications technologies?

Sexing – distribution of self-made (by children themselves) images/videos with an explicit sexual content by means of information and communications technologies . Sexting happens when children take pictures with an explicit, provocative sexual content, or containing nudity, which they then send in text-type messages. Also, sexting includes redistribution of pictures in electronic format. According to the national legislation, self-production of materials with pornographic content by children does not and cannot be submit to criminal investigation.

A., aged 7, tells that she met a little girl, O., at a party of some common family friends. The communication between the girls continued during the reciprocal visits of their parents. As told by A., during one such visit, O. proposed her to play the game “камень, ножницы, бумага (rock-paper-scissors)” on wishes, and the wishes included taking off their underwear (panties), and execute different actions (jump on the bed, turn handsprings etc.). Also, O. proposed her to video record themselves while playing. Thus, A. and O. made several video recordings with their mobile phones. Later, these videos ended up on the Internet, after being uploaded from the mobile phone of one of the girls.

Case study (from reporting to www.siguronline.md)

Sextortion or sexual blackmail – psychological constraint or manipulation (with information or images of sexual nature) for extorting sexual favors or money from the victim.

On a social network, M., aged 14, meets a boy aged 19, who introduces himself as being from Romania. The communication between M. and the boy lasts for several weeks, and during this time, he asks for more and more pictures of M. He compliments the pictures with the most beautiful words and says he fell in love with M. and very seriously thinks of coming to Moldova to meet her in reality, and also meet her parents. The boy told her that at that moment he was in the middle of his education process, which made it possible for him to travel only during summer vacation, and asked her for intimate photos. Thus, during several weeks, through psychological manipulation and false statements, the boy convinced M. to make not only intimate pictures, but also videos with sexual content. When his requests became more insistent M. tried to refuse. He replied by saying he will be “forced” to bring her to shame and let her friends on the social network know about the existence of these images. Initially, guided by fear and shame M., gave up, but the boy started to openly blackmail her. As a result, M. very soon fell into deep depression, closed herself and considerably reduced communication with her friends. Only when her academic performance got dramatically worse, her parents noticed these radical changes and insisted that M. told them about the situation.

Case study (from calls to Hotline 0800 77777)

“Good day, I am 17 years old and I have a problem. A person is threatening me from a fake account. He writes me that if I don’t send him videos showing me naked by tomorrow, he will distribute pictures that show me naked on social networks. I believe he is talking about the photos made by my ex-boyfriend, because one year ago, when we broke up, he had already threatened me with sharing these photos on Skype. But I really don’t know who is the person threatening me. Please help me and tell me what can I do...”

Case study (from reporting to www.siguronline.md)

Sex chatting or Cybersex (also called computer sex, or Internet sex, net sex and, colloquial, cybernetic sex or cybering) – consists of a virtual meeting, during which two or more persons who are far from each other, get connected through a computer network and exchange sexually explicit messages that describe a sexual experience. A sex video chat involving a child is a form of commercial sexual exploitation of children.

T., aged 16, received an employment offer as a model to her account on a social network. The message indicated that the photos she had uploaded show her as a beautiful and attractive girl, and she can become a successful model. When she called the number indicated in the message, the person who answered was a woman called D. She informed the girl that all the details about the job can be discussed face to face, not on the phone, and invited her to a film shooting studio. During the first meeting, when asked about her age, T. said she was 17 years old. D. told her that although the employment age is actually 18, this is not a problem, since they can indicate the ID of another girl, which she would use to register T. on a specialized site.

Also, D. asked about the reasons that made T. search for a job, and T. told her that the relationship with her mother is of such a nature, that she would like to be financially independent. Then D. told T. that the job required “modelling” in front of a video camera, and on the other side of the screen there will be men (clients) from different parts of the world, registered on that specialized site. T. will have to communicate with them in English. At clients’ request and if she wanted to earn more money, T. would have had to get undressed in front of the web camera and imitate a sexual act in order to excite clients. And she would have to share the payment for this job with D.

Case study (from calls to Hotline 0800 77777)

Grooming or luring for sexual purposes – a proposal intentionally made by an adult by means on information and communications technologies, in order to meet a child and commit any offence of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse against him/her, if the proposal was followed by concrete actions led to such a meeting.

On a social network M., a boy aged 12, met a person R. who introduced himself as a boy aged 17. M. was talking to his friend long hours every day. R. was interested in M.’s school activities and his occupations besides school hours. R. was also interested in the relationship of M. with his mother. M. told R. that he was living only with his mother and that he didn’t remember his father. During their conversations, M. was often telling R. that his mother was almost always busy and didn’t really have time for him, and that he was feeling lonely, that is why he was happy to have a new friend who was ready to listen to him and even give him advice. M. was happy that this friend was treating him as a grown-up teenager and that he could discuss with him issues that “mother wouldn’t understand”. Thus R. was encouraging him to better keep their discussions secret. After several weeks, R proposed M. to meet. Although M. initially hesitated, R. convinced him, since they “became real friends” and now M. was also supposed to show his friendship and openness, same as R. showed to him. Thus, R. proposed to meet in front of a hotel in Chisinau in order to get to know each other closer.

Case study (from reporting to www.siguronline.md)

Revenge porn – sexual representation of one or more persons, which is distributed without their consent. Images/videos with explicit sexual content about a partner can be made by his/her intimate partner, without any consent.

“How can I help my friend? She dated a boy some time ago, and sent him her pictures of different sexual nature. But after some time, they broke up on the girl’s request. After the break up, the boy kept trying to make up with her, and when he saw that he could not succeed, he decided to harm her. He asked for help from a friend, who created a false page on a social network, and uploaded sexual pictures of my friend. Then he gave access to this account to the girl’s ex-boyfriend, and the latter sent friendship requests to several people from the friend list of the girl’s father and shared the images ...”

Case study (from reporting to www.siguronline.md)

T., a girl aged 17, met a man aged 24 on a social network. After having communicated for a while, they decided to meet offline, and later they even started a relationship. The man was often taking pictures during his sexual intercourse with T. After some time, the girl decided to finish the relationship, which was not convenient for her partner, and he started to blackmail her with making her compromising pictures public if she doesn’t continue their relationship.

The circumstances were revealed when the girl got to hospital with a severe form of depression, where after some time, in safe physical and psychologic conditions, she had the courage to tell her mother about the sexual abuse she was submitted to, and the blackmail that followed. The girl’s health situation got worse from the moment she started being blackmailed by the abuser.

Case study (from reporting to Hotline 0 800 77777)

Are the children in the Republic of Moldova exposed to the risks of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse online?

The degree of Internet penetration in Moldovan households significantly increased, and the penetration rate of mobile Internet is still growing. The data for 2016, published by the National Regulatory Agency for Electronic Communications and Information Technology, show that the number of clients using Internet services increased by 39,4%, compared to the number of clients in the same period of last year. These data confirm the high demand, but also the availability of these services. Children, especially small ones, were born in the digital era. For them ICT is something absolutely natural, as it is always in their hands and pockets, at home, in cafeterias, at transport stops, in public parks etc.

On one hand, fast development and availability of information and communications technologies

provides children and youth with huge opportunities for developing their creativity, communication and learning skills, since the Internet has no "citizenship" or "borders". On the other hand, this development also has a negative feature, which allows for distribution of illegal and harmful content, which is especially dangerous for children and teenagers. The majority of risks children and teenagers are exposed to are not particularly related to them only – the risks are identical for adults too. And they are not generated exclusively by using specific information and communications technology – both children and adults are exposed to the same risks as in real life. Still, children and teenagers are more vulnerable than adults, due to their age. In this context, the risks of exposure to sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, and to other forms of violence are obvious.

Thus, the data from the "Internet Watch Foundation" show an increase of the content involving severe sexual abuse against children, and the number of images with the most severe forms of abuse increased by 4 times (images of abuse with penetration or sadist sexual actions). It was also identified that the number of images produced "at home" exceeded the number of commercial images. This tendency shows an increase of the request for pictures of the most severe sexual abuse, taking into consideration that approximately 60% of commercial web pages are selling pictures of child rape. The same Report of the Foundation shows that approximately 29% of all URL known as potential sources that commercialize illegal materials, contain images of most severe sexual abuse against children. In parallel, there is a decreasing tendency for the age of the child abused while producing illegal content, over 53% of these portray children aged under 10. The number of web pages commercializing such materials increased by approximately 1.500 in the last 15 years.

In 2016, an increase of the number of photos and videos containing sexual abuse against children was registered. The majority of them were coming from North America and were distributed for Europe. At the same time there was an increase by 112% of techniques used to hide photos and videos on the Internet.

The EU Kids Online Report from 25 European states indicates that 15% of children aged 11-16 received "messages or images with sexual content... discussions about sex and images of naked persons or people having sex" and 3% stated that they had sent or published such messages .

The most recent and the only data in the Republic of Moldova are reflected in the research report "Child Safety Online" 2014 edition, according to which 11% of children indicated that they received "indecent proposals" from persons they only knew online. This number increased by 7% compared to 2011.

During the first six months of 2017, the police in the Republic of Moldova identified more than 10 cases involving minors aged 7 - 11, who produced and uploaded images or short videos, in which they appear naked or half-naked. These images and videos were circulating freely on the Internet, being hunted by aggressors. Also, there is an increase in the number of cases reported to the police, in which children were asked by a person met online to produce and send to that person images or videos showing their own body sexually exposed.

Also during this period, there was an increase of the number of requests on www.siguronline.md portal from children and parents, related to cases of sexual abuse online, and specifically cases in which children were asked to send pictures of themselves naked, were asked to meet in reality or were blackmailed with disclosing their images of sexual nature if they don't continue sending photos or videos of the same nature.

Does the Republic of Moldova legislation incriminate these forms of abuse? Is the legislation on child protection from online sexual abuse efficient?

After the ratification of the Lanzarote Convention, the criminal legislation was amended with new articles which incriminate several forms of sexual abuse against children.

Thus, the action of "sex chatting" is found in the provisions of art. 206 of the Criminal Code and is a form of commercial sexual exploitation of a child, in case if the child was involved in practicing sex chatting by an adult. If a child receives images of sexual nature from an adult, the adult's actions represent holding discussions of an obscene nature with a child and will be punished in accordance with art. 175 of the Criminal Code. Nevertheless, art. 175 incriminates discussions about sex only with a person who didn't reach the age of 16, which means that in all the other cases such actions will not be criminalized.

The action of "grooming" or luring the minor for sexual

purposes (art. 1751, Criminal Code) is also under punishment. Still, one of the problems found is that this article is not applicable in practice, because often online communication with a minor aiming at setting up a meeting with him/her and planning to commit a sexual crime is absorbed by an actual sexual crime (rape, sexual intercourse with a minor aged under 16 etc.).

The action of "revenge porn" is included in the offence of child pornography. Thus, any person older than 16, who distributes or uploads on a network a video with sexual content featuring a child, can be held accountable in accordance with the provisions of art. 2081 CC RM.

Sexting – the legislation of the Republic of Moldova does not incriminate sharing images with sexual content between children aged under 16. If an adult has such images and shares them in the online space, his/her actions will be qualified as ownership or distribution of

child pornography, which falls under the offence provided by art. 2081 of the Criminal Code. Still, in cases when an image with pornographic content is distributed by a child aged 16, he/she can get under criminal charge in accordance with art. 2081 CC RM.

In the legislation of the Republic of Moldova the action of soliciting sexual favors or money in exchange for not publishing information or images of sexual nature of a person – which is called “sextortion” or “sexual blackmail” – can be included in the crimes provided by art. 189 CC RM, if there is also a request of a material nature.

Which are the recommendations for immediate implementation?

- Develop a special law on special protection of children from any form of abuse, and which would clearly nominate the competent institutions and their obligations in the field of prevention, investigation and protection of children. The law has to separate the situations in which children share photographs with pornographic content with other children, from the situations when such pictures are shared by an adult.
- Explanatory decisions which would clearly define psychologic constraint. The latter (psychologic constraint) provides qualification of actions as rape offence or sexual intercourse with a person aged under 16.

Does the state make any efforts to empower parents in providing support and education to their children on safe use of the Internet?

Although there is no data at the national level about the understanding of the parents’ role in developing a safer Internet for children, the general attitudes show a very low level of knowledge about the risks that children can be exposed to online, and on the protection measures that can be applied.

Some parents have a negative attitude towards Internet, and prefer repressive measures. Others, although may know the harmful effects, cannot apply protection measures (for example, parental control instruments). The rest of them, due to lack of knowledge, have a risky online behavior themselves, and by this behavior they put their own children at risk (for example, by posting less discrete pictures of their children, posting personal data of children etc.).

Currently, the state does not make efforts to provide digital education to parents and inform them about the online risks, protection methods and instruments for preventing threats, as well as about ways to guide the child in safe browsing, recognize threats and ensure protection measures.

Which are the recommendations for immediate implementation?

- Ensure access to information on safe Internet browsing for children in an accessible language for parents.
- Constantly develop information activities adapted to the needs of parents according to the age categories of their children.
- Constantly organize awareness raising and support campaigns for parents, in order to make them adopt a responsible and positive attitude about safe Internet browsing for their children.
- Provide some parental control options, which parents could use in order to ensure online protection of their children and encourage the private sector to contribute for this cause.

Does the state make efforts to inform children on how to browse safely, identify risks and apply protection methods, or to know where to ask for help etc.?

The speed of the informational technology development requires constant education of children about risks, tendencies and safe behavior online. Children must receive information on ways to use the Internet in safe conditions and with respect for their private life in an accessible language for their age . The data of the "Child Safety Online" Study, 2014 edition, show that a great number of children have a risky behavior online, mostly because they don't know about the consequences that might result from such behavior .

Currently, there is an informational gap regarding online safety of children and risks of uninformed and unprotected use of informational technology. The school curriculum has a very narrow and segmented approach towards the topic of the safe use of ICT and includes only some specific age categories, and the subject of risks of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse online is totally absent. At the same time, didactic staff are not provided with the support materials for achieving this goal.

The subjects related to intelligent use of the Internet and safe browsing are missing from the agendas of the recreation centers for children, and the online informational resources created or managed by state institutions within specific programs or projects dedicated to children and youth, do not provide information on this topic.

Which are the recommendations for immediate implementation?

- Include the topic on risks of informational technology use in the curriculum, adapted for specific age categories.
- Stimulate production of creative and educational content for children, and promotion of positive experience for children in the online environment.
- Encourage communication and cooperation between private sector, civil society and public sector in order to ensure respect for child rights in the online environment.
- Support by all possible means the inclusion of the safe online browsing subject in the curricula of recreation and education centers for children and youth.
- Introduce the topic "A Safer Internet" on the list of topics for debates, essays, research in education institutions, thus encouraging self-education and development of a positive, responsible and safe behavior online.
- Ensure access of children and youth to information about assistance and protection in cases of risk, related to online violence, including cases of sexual abuse or sexual exploitation online.
- Implement the National Plan on promotion of safety online, which is a complex document that regulates both: promotion of a safer Internet for children, as well as public awareness and information about the risks in the online environment.

Services provided by the International Center “La Strada”?



For teenaged Internet users

- Informative seminars *#SintIntelligentOnline* in schools, conducted by volunteers, young people trained accordingly.
- Information and individual counseling on www.siguronline.md, the only digital resource center in the country, which provides information about online risks, advice and recommendations on safe browsing, tips on how to recognize risk situations and ways for prevention and protection, guidance on how to help a friend in an unpleasant situation.

For parents and caregivers

- Informative sessions *#SintPărinteIntelligent* on online risks, safe browsing for children on the Internet and ways in which a parent can help his/her child.
- Advice and individual counselling on www.siguronline.md
- Specialized assistance from an attorney or psychologist in cases of (online) sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children.

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