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Protecting Childhood: Examining European Policies on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

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Protecting Childhood: Examining European Policies on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children



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GLO 100: Introduction to Global Studies

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1. Abstract

Children account for more than one-fourth of all people in forced commercial sexual exploitation and for one-third of all discovered trafficked individuals, rising to fifty percent in low-income countries. Moreover, child sex trafficking has only increased over the years, with many European countries predominantly recognized as destination and transit countries for commercial sexual exploitation. This paper examines and evaluates the current methods of reducing and preventing sex trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Europe. Next, it holistically analyzes and reviews the issue globally, determining each strategy's overall efficacy, practicality, and potential downsides. These strategies call for greater international cooperation, mobilization of resources, and strengthening and implementing effective laws and policies. As a result, the following recommendations are made: integrating children's voices in policy-making, creating a multi-stakeholder response, and focusing on demand reduction for child sexual abuse material.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

Often wrongly seen as the perpetrator rather than the victim, children in trafficking must be seen as victims of abuse and survivors who require supportive services such as safe housing and counseling or therapy. “Forced commercial sexual exploitation” refers to all types of child sexual exploitation, including using, procuring, or offering children to produce materials that promote child sex abuse. Many confuse trafficking with smuggling and migration, yet they have distinct differences. Trafficking and smuggling have similar premises with crossing borders and illegal entry to another country; however, “it is the element of coercion, deception, and exploitation resulting in victims being subjected to exploitation of services or slavery that



Figure 1. *Stop Child Trafficking Branding*

characterizes trafficking, regardless of whether it occurred at the beginning of the journey, during the journey when help is offered, or at the end of the journey” (Geneva, 2022). It is essential to understand these differences to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to address and prevent trafficking while protecting children’s rights.

The World Health Organization defines *sex trafficking* as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship

to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.” It is further specified that coercion can include a whole spectrum of degrees of force. Apart from physical force, it may involve psychological intimidation, blackmail, or other threats such as abduction, drugging, being held captive, deception, manipulation of debt, and

confiscating identity documents (European Commission, 2020).

Regarding child sex trafficking, there does not have to be any proof that the perpetrator or the victim crossed state or international lines, nor definitive proof of coercion. The age of the victim is proof. As the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* outlines, a child or a minor is anyone aged up to eighteen, after which one becomes a legal adult. The phrases 'commercial sexual exploitation of children' and 'child sex trafficking,' while overlapping, are often used interchangeably, yet various legal systems often consider them separate crimes with differing punishments. Looking at the United States of America, the punishment for sex trafficking and commercial exploitation is dependent on the age of the victim and federal sentencing guidelines in which the sentencing can be anywhere from a minimum of 10 years for adults to a lifetime in prison for children. Germany has a similar premise in which the punishment for child sexual abuse or trafficking can range from 6 months to 10 years, yet more often than not, judges will only provide sentences of 2 years or less. There is no differentiation between the trafficking of minors and adults; however, there was a comprehensive rework of the criminal justice system in which "Trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation" now falls under trafficking in persons.

As seen below in *Figure 2*, the age of consent varies from country to country across Europe. Globally, the lowest is 11 years old in Nigeria, and the highest is around 19 in South Korea, a country that was once among the lowest. The age of consent in South Korea was recently raised from 13 to protect teenagers from sex crimes at a fundamental level. However, there remains a stigma surrounding sexual abuse at all ages. While there is no international treaty that establishes a legal age for sexual activities, the Committee of the Rights of the Child treaty states that any presumed consent to exploitative or abusive acts is considered null and void.

Nevertheless, The United States of America is one of two countries that has not ratified it. “A child at or above the age of sexual consent may, with her/his consent, be engaged in sexual activities. However, no child should ever, under any circumstances, be able to legally consent to her/his own exploitation or abuse. It is therefore important that States criminalize all forms of sexual exploitation of children ..., and consider any presumed “consent” to exploitative or abusive acts as null and void” (Greijer & Doek, 2016). Unfortunately, the age of consent is 14, which is relatively low on the spectrum.

On the other hand, the age of majority in Germany is 18, or the age at which one is legally regarded as an adult and has all of the rights and responsibilities that come with maturity. This age gap leaves much room for interpretation regarding sexual intercourse, especially as Germany has no clear definition of child pornography. According to the “Executive Summary Germany” by ECPAT (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking), “Germany continues to make significant efforts to improve its legislation against CSEC [Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children]”; however, they have very few national plans of action against child trafficking, sexual or not.

One of Europe’s leading risk factors for sexual exploitation is prostitution, which has its own risk factors, but they are fundamentally the same as sex trafficking. Prostitution is the act of engaging in sexual activity in exchange for resources or monetary funds. “In Romania and Albania, for instance, a high proportion are Roma children and homeless children living on the

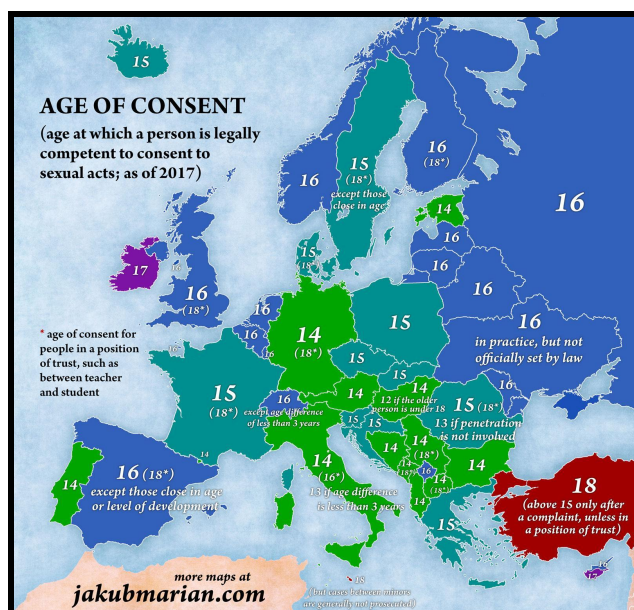


Figure 2. Age of Consent Across Europe



Figure 3. *There's No Such Thing As A Child Prostitute*

streets; in Poland, victims are mainly unaccompanied foreign minors and children living in residential care institutions. In Austria and Estonia, children providing sex services include those abusing or addicted to drugs, while in Germany, many child victims have experienced sexual abuse or other forms of violence in the family” (ECPAT, 2014). Sex trafficking is more likely to occur among marginalized children who are victims of poverty, social exclusion, and discrimination, children on the move (especially unaccompanied or separated), children with disabilities, children in residential care, and children abandoned by their parents. Over half of all children in forced labor are in commercial sexual exploitation, with girls and women constituting 98% of those trafficked for commercial sexual abuse. More than one-quarter of all people subjected to coerced commercial sexual exploitation are male and female children. The amount of trafficking in children has only increased over the years, illustrating the necessity for change and more policies highlighting trauma-centered care, advocacy for kids, and “addressing the risks, drivers and enhancing protective factors for child sexual abuse and exploitation” (United Nation’s Children’s Fund, 2020).

2.2 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* was proposed by the General Assembly and adopted in 1989, stating that childhood is separate from adulthood, anytime after the age of 18 or the applicable age of majority, and that children have the right to human rights, protection, and certain childly activities. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a group of eighteen

experts that regulate and oversee the implementation of the previously stated Convention, ensuring that all Member States comply with the outlined regulations on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography (OPSC).

Each article outlines an individual right of the child, such as protection from sexual exploitation (Article 34), protection from abduction, sale, and trafficking (Article 35), right to recovery from trauma and reintegration (Article 39), protection from violence, abuse and neglect (Article 19), and the right of children to know their rights (Article 42). The Convention altered how children are perceived and treated, transforming them from passive recipients of care and charity to human beings with unique rights. The Convention's exceptional approval demonstrates a robust worldwide commitment to promoting children's rights.

2.3 What Contributes to the Problem?

2.3a Clandestine Nature of Trafficking

It is nearly impossible to collect statistics on trafficking and exploitation with the primary data coming from identified child sex trafficking survivors. No one truly knows how prevalent trafficking is as the whole premise surrounds being undetected from the law, with the sex-trafficked child being unable or unwilling to report due to age, threats, bondage debt, etc., and traffickers and offenders are constantly discovering new ways to conceal their operations. Whether continuously moving around, holding them hostage, or migrating from the streets to more private places, they always appear to be one step ahead of the authorities. "Due to the ease with which minors can be moved across the EU, they are often sent from one country to another to exploit weaknesses in the systems or laws of other countries. If a child comes to the notice of competent authorities, he or she will be immediately relocated and used in a new country or city to continue the revenue-making exercise and reduce the risk to the traffickers" (ECPAT, 2014).

The victims of sex trafficking are rotated rapidly, remaining in the same city for no more than a few days to decrease the chances of being recognized, having the ability to ask for help, or running away.



Figure 4. *The Reality of Human Trafficking*

Another noteworthy development is the increased internet use for recruiting victims and publicizing their services. “The perceived anonymity and mass audience of online services increases both the discretion and profitability of these services; it is anticipated [as of 2014] that the number of women and girls sexually exploited in less visible, online environments will continue to rise” (ECPAT, 2014). This has only proven to be confirmed in our increasingly digital age. According to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children (2017), COVID-19 has significantly increased the risk of online child commercial sexual exploitation (Geneva, 2022), as the “pandemic limits opportunities and potentially pushes trafficking further underground, while constraining law enforcement capacities to target the crime” (ECPAT, 2014).

2.3b Legal and Cultural Norms that Support Violence

Every country has its definition of sexual violence and exploitation in which what may be illegal in one country is not in another. “Social and cultural norms are rules or expectations of behaviour and thoughts based on shared beliefs within a specific cultural or social group. While

often unspoken, norms offer social standards for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour that govern what is (and is not) acceptable in interactions among people” (Tomaszewski, 2018). Child sexual abuse and exploitation include diverse acts of abuse in different settings and relationships. It can be anything from being raped by an intimate partner, being sexually abused by a guardian or caregiver, or being forced to turn to prostitution to survive - otherwise known as “survival sex.” The United States of America has not ratified the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, arguing that it “would limit the US sovereignty or would cause unlimited interference in family life” (Minasyan, 2018), which raises a variety of questions regarding cultural norms of sexual violence in the USA.

While having ratified the Convention, other countries have similar issues concerning child marriage. South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa have the highest rates of child marriage among females, a primary risk factor for CSEC. As shown in *Figure 5*, “Once [someone is] forced to marry, there is a greater risk of sexual exploitation, violence, and domestic servitude and other forms of forced labour both inside and outside the home. Females are more likely than males to report being forced to perform

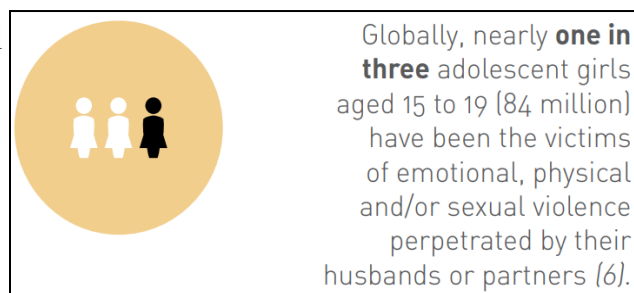


Figure 5. Intimate Partner Violence

work by their spouse or the spouse’s family” (Geneva, 2022). Child sexual abuse is often a taboo, hidden, and stigmatizing topic. With immense cultural variance, it is impossible to set up universal guidelines that abide by each nation’s beliefs and regulations. The cultural norms that promote sexual violence and the exploitation of children, or at the fundamental level, gender inequality and discrimination, must be combatted before global change can occur.

2.4 Urgency

Children as young as infants are subject to trafficking and exploitation. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) CyberTipline receives more than 21.7 million reports of apparent child sexual abuse material. The amount of trafficking in persons has only increased over the years, with the percentage of children affected growing exponentially. Every country is affected by sex trafficking. The International Labor Organisation has stated that

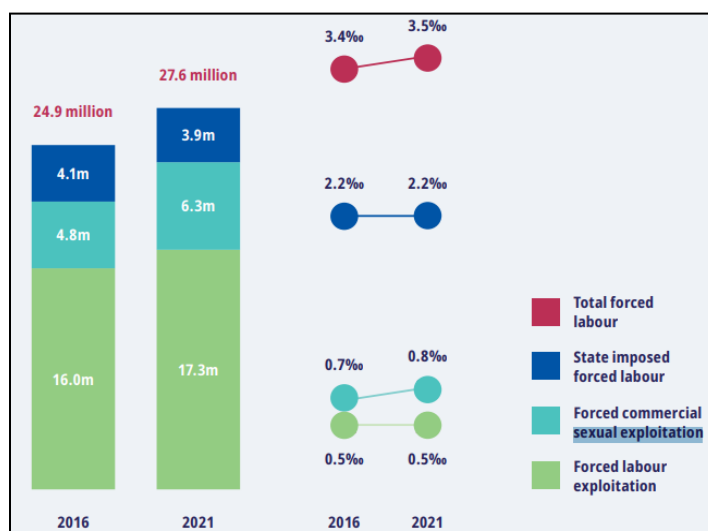


Figure 6. Number and Prevalence of People in Forced Labour, by Sub-Category, 2016 and 2021

“the human trafficking enterprise is considered to be the third most profitable criminal activity, generating profits estimated at 32 billion US dollars annually” (Rafferty, 2013). In this time of constant conflict, it is worrying that an increasing amount of research suggests that other humanitarian crises, such as war and disease, can worsen current human

trafficking patterns and create new ones. The current war in Ukraine has amplified the risk of commercial sexual exploitation, and COVID-19 has heightened the risk of online exploitation.

2.5 Statement of Purpose

This paper evaluates different policy options whose goal is reducing the number of children in sex trafficking and exploitation and providing adequate resources for the survivors. Child sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation are reaching an unprecedented level: It has become a humanitarian crisis that needs immediate action, or the number of victims will only continue to grow. The policy options evaluated in this paper include implementing

comprehensive preventative measures, understanding societal norms, and training specialized law enforcement groups. Policymakers must address this issue immediately and protect children's rights and physical, mental, and social health.

2.6 Methodology

Through examining policy papers, literature, case studies, scholarly articles, and economic statistics, this paper will evaluate the efficacy of various policies regarding child sex trafficking and commercial exploitation, primarily in Europe. Child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation is a transnational crime that has only expanded over the years and is in direct violation of the right of minors to protection and well-being. As a German-American citizen, I have been lucky enough to travel to Europe and experience German culture throughout my life. However, growing up, I was unaware of information or policies regarding trafficking there. Reports from the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NMEC) indicate that the EU has become the largest host of child sexual abuse material globally (from over half in 2016 to over two-thirds in 2019). Europol has stated that approximately one in five European children fall victim to some form of sexual violence. That being said, the idea emerged to focus my policy paper on the German and European policies created to combat sexual exploitation among children.

This paper has some limitations, with the main one being the minimal amount of data available because it is such an illicit topic. As previously stated, the clandestine nature of trafficking has led to uncoordinated data collection and incorrect statistics regarding trafficking in children and commercial exploitation. Due to the explicit nature of child sex trafficking, there are no significant adverse consequences around policy reform, simply items the policies have left out. The only drawback is that it would reduce trade or sex tourism and result in a loss of

economic revenue, but this is negligible when discussing a severe issue such as sexual exploitation and trafficking.

3. Option 1: Implement and Develop a New Legal Framework

3.1 Overview

The European Union's (EU) motto is *United in Diversity*, comprising 27 Member States with their own culture, language, and customs. Nevertheless, they are all rooted in democracy and share fundamental core values. Made up of 3 branches, as shown in *Figure 7*, each sector of the European Union has a specific role in foreign policy and internal decision-making. The European Commission is the EU's executive body, proposing legislation, implementing European laws, and supervising the union's administrative activities. The Council of The European Union functions as a collective entity that defends the overall political directions and priorities of the European Union. It

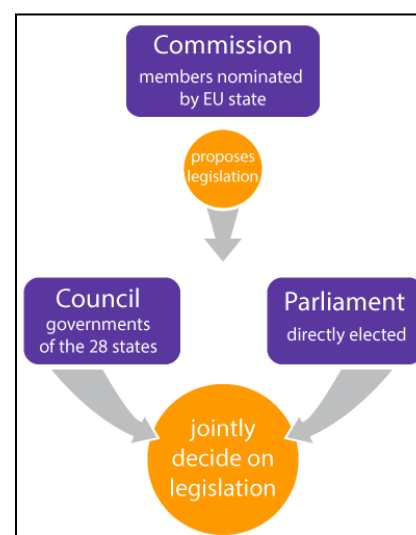


Figure 7. *The Institutional Triangle*

comprises the head of state of each member country, along with the president of the European Parliament and the European Commission. The Council of the European Union is a collegiate body that defends the overall political directions and priorities. It comprises the head of state of each member state, plus the president of the European Parliament and European Commission. It also focuses on the Court of Justice/Bank, monetary policy/customs, border control, market regulation/commercial policy, marine conservation, and certain international agreements. Last but not least, the European Parliament is the second-largest democratic electoral assembly in the world and approves European legislation (Roh, 2022).

“The EU is founded on six core values that form the basis of our society: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, [and] respect for human rights, including those of minorities” (EU & Me, n.d.). The EU has reworked its efforts to prioritize combatting child sexual abuse in its Member States. The European Commission has proposed legislation that will be implemented from 2020 to 2025 due to the European Parliament and the Council calling for more tangible action. The proposed strategy “provides a framework for developing a strong and comprehensive response to these crimes, both in their online and offline form. It sets out eight initiatives to implement and develop the right legal framework, strengthen the law enforcement response, and catalyze a coordinated multi-stakeholder action in relation to prevention, investigation, and assistance to victims.” (European Commission, 2020). The primary goal of this policy is to offer an effective response to child sexual abuse and uphold the protection of children’s rights at the EU level. These eight initiatives are:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. A European centre to prevent & counter child sexual abuse | 5. Galvanise industry efforts to ensure the protection of children in their products |
| 2. Identify legislative gaps, best practices & priority actions | 6. Enable Member States to better protect children through prevention |
| 3. Improve protection of children globally through multi-stakeholder cooperation | 7. Ensure complete implementation of current legislation |
| 4. Strengthen law enforcement efforts at national and EU level | 8. Ensure that EU legislation enables an effective response |

It has become clear that the world is losing the war against these crimes and failing to adequately defend each child’s right to live free from violence (European Commission, 2020). The EU’s initiatives are a step in the right direction, with child sexual abuse being a global issue that

requires a coordinated and comprehensive response from all actors. By prioritizing the protection of children's rights and promoting international cooperation, society can prevent sexual abuse and exploitation from the very beginning.

3.2 Advantages

3.2a Strengthen the Law Enforcement Response

Simply having a team that can address child sex trafficking and exploitation does not equate to eradicating it unless they can comprehend the risks and drivers of the situation, as well as the proper way to treat victims. The EU has set up specialized teams that are fully equipped and staffed with well-trained officers who understand the implications of trafficking and exploitation and the psychosocial effects on the children. Child abuse may be divided into various forms and has substantial long-term effects on victims, such as significant and long-term social or physical trauma (European Commission, 2020). As will be mentioned in 6.3b, tracking perpetrators has become more complex with the increased use of the internet and technology that can prevent detection by law enforcement. The need for specificity is exceptionally high with a clandestine topic such as child exploitation, and it is extremely easy to miss the signs or lose a trafficker. From 2020 to 2025, "Europol will set up an Innovation Hub and Lab [seen below in *Figure 8*] and the Commission will provide funding to facilitate the development of national capacities to keep up with technological developments and ensure an effective response of law enforcement against these crimes" (European Commission, 2020). Strengthening the law enforcement response to child sex trafficking and commercial exploitation can increase awareness, protect children, punish abusers, and deter perpetrators from offending.

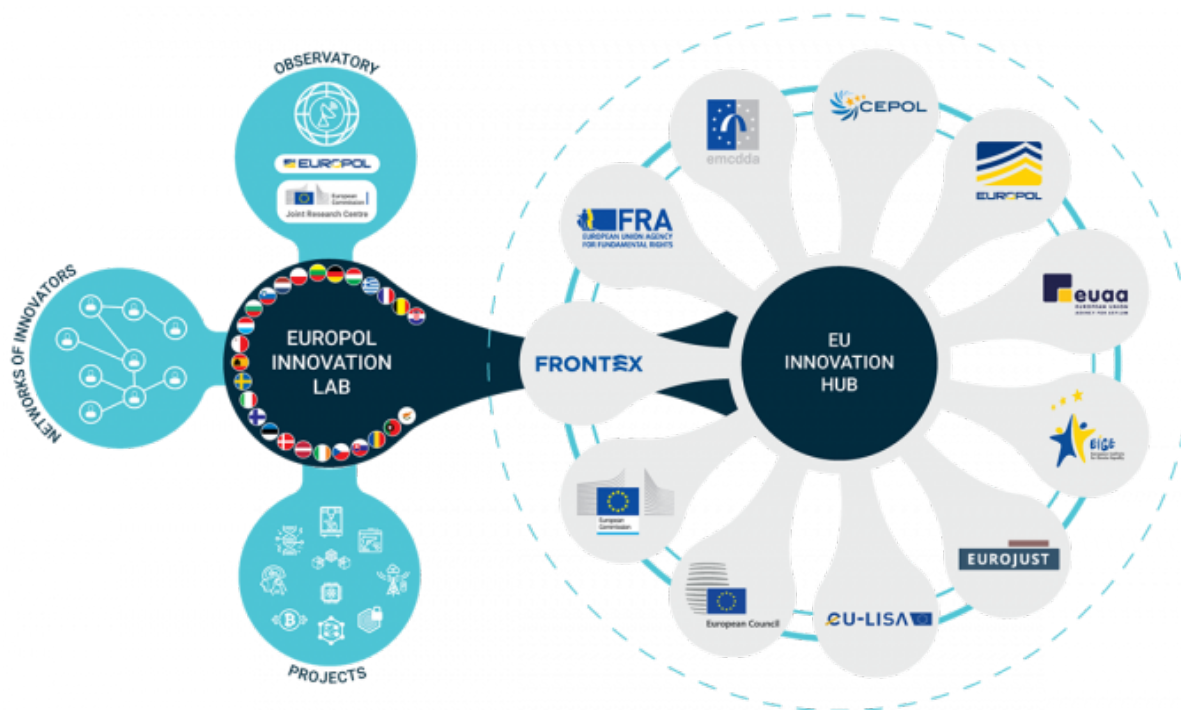


Figure 8. *Europol Innovation Lab Breakdown*

Additionally, by collaborating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as ECPAT (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking) who believes “in holding governments accountable for implementing and enforcing laws to protect children... [and] are committed to raising the global awareness in the fight against the sexual exploitation of children” (ECPAT, n.d), authorities can increase public awareness about the issue. This can result in increased support for attempts to address the sexual exploitation of minors, which is one of the first phases in creating governmental reform. Moreover, “the Commission will start working towards the possible creation of a European centre to prevent and counter child sexual abuse, based on a thorough study and impact assessment. The centre would provide holistic support to Member States in the fight against child sexual abuse, online and offline, ensuring coordination to maximise the efficient use of resources and avoiding duplication of efforts” (European Commission, 2020).

3.2b Catalyse a Coordinated Multi-Stakeholder Action

For this policy to be entirely efficient and create a lasting impact, the European Union must catalyse a coordinated multi-stakeholder response in which each member State must participate. “In 2011, the EU took an important step with the adoption of the Child Sexual Abuse Directive (2011/93/EU20), whose implementation in Member States now has to be finalised as a matter of urgency. In parallel, any identified legislative gaps need to be addressed through the most appropriate means” (European Commission, 2020). The Child Sexual Abuse Directive outlined that “sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children, including child pornography, constitute serious violations of fundamental rights, in particular of the rights of children to the protection and care necessary for their well-being” (European Union, 2011). It was the first comprehensive EU legal instrument that outlined the prevention, investigation, and punishment for child sexual abuse material, sexual abuse of minors, and sexual exploitation of children (European Union, 2011).

As of right now, the Commission will immediately begin preparing an EU-wide prevention network to allow the exchange of best practices and provide assistance to Member States in implementing thoroughly examined, useable, and successful preventative measures to reduce the occurrence of child sexual abuse within the EU (European Commission, 2020). Furthermore, “the Commission will launch immediately a study to work towards the creation of a European centre to prevent and counter child sexual abuse to enable a comprehensive and effective EU response against child sexual abuse online and offline” (European Commission, 2020). These steps are crucial to the fight against child sexual abuse. They will aid in identifying children listed on the International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) database created by Interpol or Europol’s European Cybercrime Centre (EC3). Organizing more groups that will promote the

exchange of excellent procedures and the creation of practical programs that will produce tangible results and reduce the overwhelming amount of reports going to one center will maximize preventive measures and intervention efforts. The EU has stated that “the Commission will continue contributing to increase global standards for the protection of children against sexual abuse by promoting



Figure 9. *Global Network Connection, Europe*

multi-stakeholder cooperation through the WePROTECT Global Alliance, and through dedicated funding” (European Commission, 2020). There is a variety of evidence stating that offenders travel to different nations to take advantage of its lenient legal frameworks and fewer enforcement offices, allowing them to commit crimes without fear of being caught (European Commission, 2020). Therefore, “in addition to maintaining national intelligence databases, Member States should therefore invest in systematically channeling relevant intelligence to Europol, as a central EU criminal information hub, to support each other in tackling cross-border cases” (European Commission, 2020). In order to prevent and lower the rates of child exploitation, it is therefore vital to have a global infrastructure coupled with high levels of enforced regulation within States. *It takes a network to defeat a network.*

3.2c Comprehensive Response to all Forms of Sexual Exploitation & Abuse

Commercial exploitation and the procurement of child sexual abuse material can occur in multiple forms: in person, online, via images or recordings, etc. *Child sexual abuse* is a global problem that affects all countries and socioeconomic groups. It is believed that there are over

750,000 predators online at any given time, sharing child sexual abuse material, broadcasting live abuse of children, grooming children for future sexual abuse, or extorting children to generate sexual material (European Commission, 2020). The map below, *Figure 10*, depicts the

downloads of a sample of child sexual abuse content within Europe. Furthermore, to map and evaluate potential technological solutions to identify and report child sexual abuse cases in end-to-end encrypted electronic communications, the Commission



Figure 10. Map of Downloads of Sample Child Abuse Material

had started various initiatives under the supervision of the EU Internet Forum, which was able to “identify legislative and implementation gaps, best practices and priority actions” (European Commission, 2020). Additionally, to work towards decreasing the prevalence of child sexual abuse in person in the EU and facilitate the exchange of best practices, it stated that the “Commission will work on setting up a prevention network of relevant and reputed practitioners and researchers to support Member States in putting in place usable, rigorously evaluated and effective prevention measures” (European Commission, 2020). Whether sex trafficking, forced prostitution, commercial exploitation, or other categories, this policy, *EU Strategy for a More Effective Fight Against Child Sexual Abuse*, aims to provide ample resources that can not only help law enforcement, protect children, and reduce virtual exploitation but actually enforce legislation with a requirement for Member States to implement them.

3.3 Disadvantages

3.3a Requires Governmental Change

Within International Relations, the levels of analysis “refer(s) to the different aspects of international affairs that may be stressed in interpreting and explaining global phenomena,

depending on whether they focus on the “wholes” (the complete global system and large collectivities) or on “parts” (individual states or people)” (Kegley & Lindsey, 2014). The individual level of analysis involves an individual’s psychological and perceptual variables motivating them. It can encompass those responsible for making “decisions on behalf of state and non-state entities,” as well as everyday citizens whose behavior can influence politics. The individual traits of actors have a significant role in international decision-making since their beliefs, values, personality characteristics, and prior experiences encourage them to take particular stances on international issues, such as sex trafficking and commercial exploitation. “The state

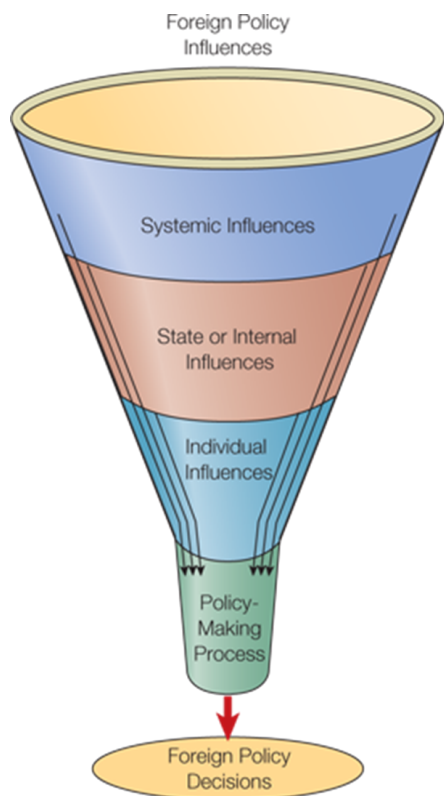


Figure 11. *Levels of Analysis, IR*

level of analysis consists of the authoritative decision-making units that govern states’ foreign policy processes and the internal attributes of those states (e.g., type of government, level of economic development, public opinion of its citizens, and strength of military power), which both shape and constrain leaders’ foreign policy choices... Every actor on the global stage is defined by its attributes, which also determine its foreign policy choices” (Kegley & Lindsey, 2014). Despite this, foreign policy decision-makers are not the only ones influencing global decision-making. The systematic influences encompass the impact of worldwide conditions on foreign policy behavior and human welfare (Cormier, 2023). “Global

conditions provide constraints and opportunities for international decision-making and color the degree to which an actor's internal attributes and individual leader preferences can account for the choices made" (Kegley & Lindsey, 2014).

As there is no international governing agency, for change to occur at a higher level, it must first occur within the nation and at the governmental level. Without a societal shift, the government will not change its policies to encompass all forms of child sex trafficking and commercial exploitation nor include proven preventative measures. The government will not feel compelled to enact new laws or ratify treaties if the public does not prioritize sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). A state that sees no necessity in increasing global, national, or regional standards is unlikely to participate in "coordinating and streamlining global efforts and regulatory improvements, and bringing about a more effective global response" (European Commission, 2020).

3.3b Requires Cooperation From All Stakeholders

Due to the international level of child trafficking, it is challenging to arrest perpetrators and track victims once they have crossed regional and international borders, especially if they have left the EU. In other words, most occurrences of child sexual abuse, especially those utilizing digital resources, are not confined to a single Member State (European Commission, 2020). This policy attempts to create coordinated responses within the Member States, yet it all depends on their compliance and cooperation. "Child sexual abuse is a complex issue which requires the maximum cooperations from all stakeholders which have to be able, willing, and ready to act" (EU & Me, n.d.). Sex trafficking can have high political implications and defines what a state values and is willing to do to stop the abuse. Although rarely falling under the most critical categories of national interests, depending on what the country values most, CSEC can

fall under the *Important* category, in which it categorizes the threat as if left unfulfilled, it will result in damage that will eventually affect core national interests, or *Peripheral* (less severe, but still unpleasant concerns that, if left unresolved, can cause social harm) (Cormier, 2023).

In some countries, such as Germany, in 2013, the government “failed to implement European Union regulations regarding human trafficking into law” (5 Facts about Human

Trafficking in Germany, 2021). Many countries will refuse to do so unless there are consequences for not implementing the standards. Although for what appears to be a fair reason, the current chancellor at the time, Angela Merkel, stated that the “government chose not to implement the EU recommendations because it did not extend existing jurisdiction on human trafficking to cases of sex trafficking.” (5



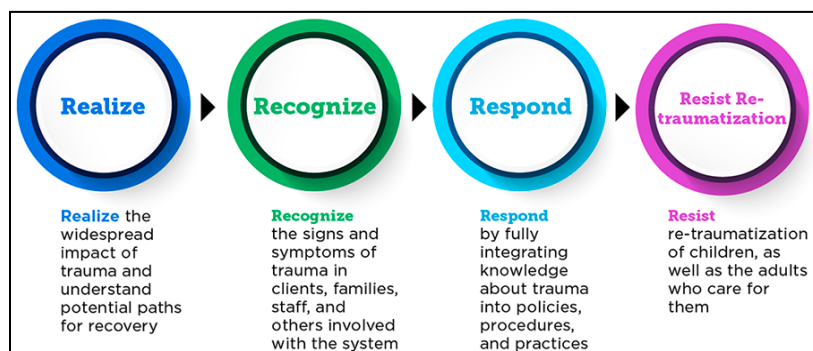
Figure 12. *Wie kann Europa den Menschenhandel bekämpfen?*

Facts about Human Trafficking in Germany, 2021). While this is true, it still would have helped to increase sentencing and protective services, and it would have been possible for the German legislature to attempt to propose such a thing. As of 2023, society still has no overarching governmental authority capable of enforcing or creating rules and regulations for all nations. Until there is consistent enforcement, it is impossible to eradicate the commercial exploitation of minors.

3.4 Comparison & Feasibility

Unlike other policies or strategies, the European Union has explicitly required its members to enforce the Child Sexual Abuse Directive (2011/93/EU20), this current policy, and any new legislation that will be proposed after thorough research into their effectiveness and

state implementation. This alone makes any EU strategy more feasible and, as a result, far more likely to be effective in combating child trafficking and commercial exploitation. It failed to



address trauma-informed care, a patient-centered approach that requires health professionals to offer treatment to avoid re-traumatizing or unintentionally harming patients.

Figure 13. *The Four R's of Trauma-Informed Care*

Trauma can change the brain's

neurobiology and affect the social, cognitive, and physical aspects of one's life, making it a primary factor in the rehabilitation and therapy of victims. However, as there were areas of improvement, intervention and treatment regulations will likely come after implementing these preventative policies.

4. Option 2: Protective Measures and Assistance to Victims

4.1 Overview

“There are no statistics on the total amount of sexual abuse of children in Europe, but it is well known that there is a considerable discrepancy between the number of reported cases of sexual abuse of children to the police and social services and actual cases” (Explanatory Report, 2007). It is believed that there are five to 10 times as many victims as are documented within the EU. For the past few decades, the Council has been working to combat child sexual abuse within its Member States and has created various texts dealing with these issues. On September 27, 2002, the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly issued the most rigid resolution regarding the sexual exploitation of minors: zero tolerance. The Assembly urged European Member States to establish policies regarding impunity and processes that prioritize the rights of

child victims and their perspectives. The other goal was to apprehend offenders without giving them any opportunity to avoid punishment. The Council of Europe's Member States reaffirmed their political commitment to combating child sexual exploitation during the second Summit of Heads of State and Government. The action plan adopted at this summit urged states to review their legislation regarding the inhumane treatment of children. It also encouraged countries to improve their ties with other Council of Europe Member States to combat all forms of child exploitation. This may include creating, selling, promoting, and owning pornographic content involving children and assisting those vulnerable or at risk. After this, protecting children against all types of violence, sexual or not, became one of the top priorities for the Council of Europe (Explanatory Report, 2007).

In 2006, the Committee of Experts on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (PC-ES) assessed the provisions and execution of the agreements and international treaties dealing with child sexual exploitation and found a need for improvement in all areas. The European Union's Framework, created by the *Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*, was the Council of Europe's hope to ensure that children's well-being and best interests are essential objectives all member nations must uphold. This framework, consisting of 13 chapters and 50 articles, encompasses various topics, including trauma-informed treatment, substantive and judicial legislation, protective measures, and support for victims. In order, the chapters are:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1. Purposes,
Non-Discrimination
Principle and Definitions | 3. Specialised Authorities and
Co-ordinating Bodies | 5. Intervention Programmes or
Measures |
| 2. Preventive Measures | 4. Protective Measures &
Assistance to Victims | 6. Substantive Criminal Law |
| | | 7. Investigation, Prosecution,
and procedural law |

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 8. Recording/Storing of data | 11. Relationship with other | 12. Amendments to the |
| 9. International co-operation | international instrument | Convention |
| 10. Monitoring mechanism | | 13. Final clauses |

The goals of this Convention are to prevent and combat child sexual exploitation and abuse, safeguard victims' rights, and encourage national and international cooperation against child sexual exploitation and abuse. Since most sexual abuse against children occurs in the family framework, by people close to the child, or by others in the child's social circle, children often have a tough time telling someone they have been sexually exploited or trafficked (Explanatory Report, 2007). Thus, it is necessary to make children feel comfortable speaking up and understand what is happening and what can be done to prevent abuse and exploitation.

4.2 Advantages

4.2a Addressing Child Pornography & Prostitution

As outlined in 2.1, *prostitution* is defined as engaging in sexual behavior with another person or people for a form of compensation. On the other hand, pornography is the presentation of erotic behavior (as in videos, photographs, or literature) to evoke sexual excitement. Chapter VI of the report, Substantive Criminal Law, outlines various offenses involving children. As mentioned in section 2.1, “‘child prostitution’ shall mean the fact of using a child for sexual activities where money or any other form of remuneration or consideration is given or promised as payment, regardless if this payment, promise or consideration is made to the child or to a third person” (Council of Europe, 2007). A considerable advantage of this policy is that it criminalizes the “corruption of children” in which one can no longer legally cause a minor to witness the sexual abuse of other children or adults or forms of sexual activity. It is also not required for the child to participate in sexual activity. Research has shown that being forced to watch these

activities harms a child's psychological well-being and may lead to a distorted vision of sex, personal relationships, and self-worth (Explanatory Report, 2007).

Similarly, child prostitution and pornography can have the same psychological repercussions, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), distrust of others, sleep disorders, and feelings of powerlessness. Sexual assault can also have physical consequences like bleeding (vaginal or anal), broken or dislocated bones, sexually transmitted infections/diseases, or bruising. Any item visually showing a child participating in physical or simulated sexually explicit activities or asexualized portrayal of a child's sexual organs is considered child pornography. In one instance, Pornhub verified a 15-year-old girl who had been kidnapped and labeled missing for a year. In reality, she was being sexually exploited and raped in Pornhub films. She was assaulted in 58 videos, and Pornhub received 35% of the profits. In 2020, the New York Times accused Pornhub of permitting films of rape, trafficking, abuse, child pornography, revenge porn, and other illegal content on the site, which led Pornhub to remove 80% of its content, over 10 million videos (Mickelwait, 2023).



Figure 14. Art piece inspired by a 15 year-old rape victim who was 'verified' on Pornhub, allowing 58 videos of her abuse to remain on their site, Laila Mickelwait (Twitter)

Simply criminalizing the coercion of a child into these businesses is not enough. The Council of Europe goes even further by criminalizing child prostitution recruitment, profiting from it, and forcing a minor to engage in it as a last resort. The same elements are forbidden in the case of child pornography, and the Council added further prohibited activities: “producing child pornography; offering or making it available; distributing or transmitting child pornography; procuring child pornography for oneself or another person; possessing child pornography; knowingly obtaining access to child pornography through information and communication technologies; knowingly attending pornographic performances involving the participation of children” (Council of Europe, 2007). Furthermore, under Article 24: Aiding or Abetting and Attempt, the Council inserted a clause about others assisting and promoting these acts, something that almost no policies have. If all forms of intentional conduct regarding child sexual abuse are prohibited, therein lies the hope that demand will decrease, removing the allure of profit.

4.2b Acknowledging Grooming

Article 23 introduces an additional offense to the Convention that exists in very few other international instruments. *Grooming* is the term used to describe the solicitation of children for sexual reasons. In other words, a child is “groomed” when another person or group manipulates them to use the child for sexual gratification. “It may involve the befriending of a child, often through the adult pretending to be another young person, drawing the child into discussing intimate matters, and gradually exposing the child to sexually explicit materials in order to reduce resistance or inhibitions about sex. The child may also be drawn into producing child pornography by sending compromising personal photos using a digital camera, web-cam or phone-cam” (Explanatory Report, 2007), giving the perpetrator a way to control and further

manipulate them via threats and blackmail. Online grooming frequently leads to in-person interactions, which result in sexual abuse and other harm to the child. Being a grooming victim can put one at risk for sex trafficking or commercial exploitation, as one can be coerced, kidnapped, and blackmailed into forced labor. Attempting to prevent grooming in the first place can reduce the number of children who recourse to prostitution and are forced into Commercial Sexual Exploitation. With over 2 million children being exploited via prostitution and pornography each year, society must take proactive measures to prevent grooming and protect vulnerable children from sexual exploitation.

4.2c Law and Hearings

Unlike most policies, the Council of Europe's Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse highlights the necessity of catering Substantive Criminal Law and Investigation, Prosecution, and Procedural Law toward the victims of child sexual abuse. The main principle states that "each Party shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that investigations and criminal proceedings are carried out in the best interests and respecting the rights of the child" (Explanatory Report, 2007). Substantive criminal law refers to the laws that define crimes and their punishments. Therefore, it is essential to create explicit legislation that defines crimes involving the sexual abuse of kids and the appropriate punishments for offenders; otherwise, it is impossible to arrest perpetrators and determine what is illegal.

Article 18 discusses that while a child may have technically reached the legal age to participate in sexual activities, they cannot consent to their exploitation, as outlined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). All policies regarding child sexual abuse acknowledge and criminalize having sexual relations with someone who has not reached the age

of consent. Most policies also recognize that engaging in sexual activities with a child where it occurs via coercion or the use of threats is illegal. However, many do not acknowledge that other intentional forms of conduct need to be criminalized, such as when the “abuse is made of a recognized position of trust, authority or influence over the child, including within the family; or [the] abuse is made of a particularly vulnerable situation of the child, notably because of a mental or physical disability or a situation of dependence” (Council of Europe, 2007). When these situations are left decriminalized, it perpetuates the cycle of abuse victimization and undermines efforts to create a safe and just society for all. Children must be aware of the predatory nature of offenders and that anyone can exploit another person: there are no limitations.



Figure 15. *Toddler Standing with Grown Man*

Familial Trafficking: Almost half of identified cases of child trafficking begin with some family member involvement.

On the other end of the spectrum, any law enforcement or professionals who investigate or prosecute such cases are required to have the necessary skills to spot instances of sexual exploitation and abuse and have appropriate knowledge of children’s rights and protection (Explanatory Report, 2007) and understand the physical and psychosocial implication that

coincide with it. Procedural law refers to the rules and processes that govern how criminal cases are handled in court. In cases of commercial exploitation, it is essential to have procedures in place that cater to the needs of the child, whether it is “ensuring that contact between victims and perpetrators within court and law enforcement agency premises is avoided,” the victim being “heard in the courtroom without being present” (Explanatory Report, 2007), or providing them with adequate support services during and after the hearing (if there is one). Differentiating between competent authorities trained in this specialization and those simply assigned to the task force can make all the difference in victims’ safety, rehabilitation, and support.

With the age of the victims of sex trafficking and commercial exploitation of minors ranging from infants to 18 years old, it is essential to give victims any necessary information in a way that is appropriate for their age and maturity, as well as in a language that they comprehend. While CSEC alone is a criminal offense, various aggravating circumstances may increase the punishment for offenders. Article 28 addresses that this offense is often “preceded or accompanied by acts of torture or serious violence” (Council of Europe, 2007), committed by a group or criminal organization or someone within the child’s social circle, and that the penalty must be adjusted accordingly. Adopting a protective approach protects children’s privacy, identity, and image and ensures that criminal procedures do not exacerbate the child’s trauma.

4.3 Disadvantages

4.3a Hotlines and Helplines

Rather than focusing solely on intervening in cases of commercial exploitation of children, preventing it from happening in the first place is a crucial proactive measure in combating it. Many people feel trapped, as if there is no way out or if they brought the situation upon themselves. As outlined in Article 13, helplines can allow victims to report their abuse or

receive support and advice. In contrast, a hotline allows others to report Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) or suspicion of commercial exploitation. However, helplines are not always helpful in providing victims with assistance. Many helplines are understaffed and underfunded, limiting their efficacy. This can make it difficult to provide comprehensive support to all who seek it, especially given the high prevalence of child sexual abuse. They are also primarily designed to support and assist those who have already experienced child sexual abuse. Children may not recognize or understand what is happening to them or comprehend that it is ‘wrong.’ Although this is a feasible solution, it does not address the root causes of the problem or prevent future instances of abuse.

Another challenge emerges when children feel ashamed or embarrassed to seek help, even through a helpline. Despite federal legislation recognizing children as victims of human trafficking, commercially sexually exploited youth are also regularly imprisoned for exploitation-related offences such as prostitution. Both of these can make it difficult for them to reach out and can exacerbate the trauma they have experienced. There is very little evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of helplines, and many victims are at the age where they are not old enough to have a phone, nor are they capable of getting one or gaining access to one; thus, it falls into the hands of bystanders to report. Reporting suspected sexual exploitation or abuse (Article 12) is tricky as the physical signs of sexual abuse are extremely rare. Traffickers may constantly be moving to avoid detection. Not staying in one place for an extended period prevents children from forming a trusting relationship with someone outside of the abuse. Hotlines may lack the resources or power to investigate and prosecute child sexual abuse cases, which is critical for holding abusers accountable and avoiding future abuse. The Council of

Europe acknowledges these as preventative measures but understands that the gravity of the issue is more complex than a simple situation.

4.3b Recording and Storing of Data

To fully identify, prevent, disrupt, and respond to child sexual abuse requires the recording and storing of national data on convicted sexual offenders. There is no such thing as a universal human trafficker or abuser profile; there are only identifiable risk factors that can increase the likelihood that one may become the perpetrator. Although research indicates that those with Child Sexual Exploitation Material (CSEM) offender records have lower recidivism rates, there is very little data on sex traffickers and sexual offenders involved in the commercial exploitation of minors. Chapter VIII, Article 37 of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse report states that their primary “objective was to ensure that certain data on perpetrators of the offenses defined in the Convention are recorded and stored for the purposes of prevention and prosecution of such offenses” (Council of Europe, 2007). This required each member state to house information regarding offenders’ genetic profile and their overall identity. Their sexual preference, medical data, and data relating to previous convictions may be housed with special precautions in place, as it is considered sensitive data. Article 37 does not require the creation of an international or, at the very least, an intranational database, which prevents law enforcement from quickly accessing the information. “The data in question and the past history of the persons concerned may, therefore, very well be included in separate databases. This means it is also possible for information about sex offenders to exist in databases that do not necessarily contain only information about such offenders” (Explanatory Report, 2007). Law enforcement and

investigators will have to search through multiple databases for information about a specific case, wasting time that could be spent on other interventions or preventive measures.

Another issue arises with traffickers frequently relocating to avoid detection by law enforcement. Cases involving the commercial sexual exploitation of minors may often fall under multiple jurisdictions if they consist of the trafficking of children across state or national borders, virtual exploitation, or clients of other nations. With no international database, law enforcement may not have access to crucial information that can help arrest an offender, thus requiring multiple agencies to collaborate in investigating and prosecuting the perpetrator. As mentioned in 3.3b, *Requires Cooperation From All Stakeholders*, this is not easy to facilitate and brings more challenges. To address these issues, law enforcement agencies need to work together to exchange information and resources as well as implement effective strategies for detecting and prosecuting traffickers. Once effective at the regional level, working outwards until a worldwide system is established will help to guarantee that traffickers cannot avoid prosecution by crossing borders and will assist as many victims as possible.

4.4 Comparison & Feasibility

Encompassing so many measures, ranging from law to the corruption of children and AI child sexual abuse material and grooming, this policy proposed by the Council of Europe is one of the strongest implemented. While it is difficult to implement every measure, criminalizing all forms of intentional child sexual abuse conduct will aid in reducing the prevalence of trafficking and exploitation. It will also send a strong message that such behavior will not be tolerated in any form. To ensure its success, it will require a coordinated effort from EU governments, various organizations, and all citizens, something quite challenging to achieve. Nonetheless, the Council

of Europe’s policy is a crucial step toward protecting children and their rights, as well as promoting their well-being, safety, and security.

6. Option 3: INSPIRE Implementation on a International Level

6.1 Overview

INSPIRE is a research-based resource created by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), focused on preventing and reacting to violence against children and adolescents. “It reinforces the protections guaranteed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which obliges States Parties to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures to protect children from all forms of violence” (INSPIRE Seven Strategies for Ending Violence against Children, 2016). The seven proposed strategies for eliminating child abuse outline various measures that have been proven effective in preventing violence toward children.

They are:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| → The implementation and enforcement of laws | → Norms and values |
| → Education and life skills | → Response and support services |
| → Parent and caregiver support | → Income and economic strengthening |
| | → Safe environment |

“Sexual abuse and exploitation of minors is a violation of human rights as well as a public health issue with serious implications for world health and development” (UNICEF, 2020). It requires multidimensional solutions that must address all kinds of abuse, whether sexual, physical, or emotional. The procedures to respond to and prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation require evidence “to address the developmental and safeguarding needs of children as victims and perpetrators, recognising that a child can be both abused and harming others” (UNICEF, 2020).

6.2 Advantages

6.2a Changing Social Norms and Behaviour

Societal tolerance of the victimization of females and perpetration by males is a crucial component that renders children vulnerable to sexual violence (and increases the possibility that males will perpetrate such violence and create a never-ending cycle). Reducing the romanticization of sexual abuse, which sets the stage for rape culture and sexual exploitation, is crucial in mitigating child sex trafficking and commercial exploitation. Unfortunately, the reporting rates of abuse or exploitation are meager since communities or families see it as normal and unavoidable. This, combined with shame, fear, and the belief that no one can help, contributes to the low reporting rate. Under the Norms and Values section, INSPIRE aims to “strengthen norms and values that support non-violent, respectful, nurturing, positive and gender equitable relationships for all children and adolescents” (INSPIRE Seven Strategies for Ending Violence against Children, 2016). This objective has prompted new policies that encourage reports of sexual violence against children and “make certain forms of violence a punishable offence” (INSPIRE Seven Strategies for Ending Violence against Children, 2016).

“On a fundamental level, despite legislation making child labour illegal, adults have treated children as property throughout history. “The legal system has routinely held parental rights in great deference, viewing the business of raising children as a ‘private’ matter” ” (Breger, 2021, pp. 135-192), shown through the US’s refusal to ratify the CRC. Several misconceptions have expanded the tolerance of child exploitation, diverting attention away from these individuals’ suffering. These include prostitution being an appropriate job to turn to when people have no other options for income or the belief that individuals who prostitute do it because they enjoy it; it is a simple business and easy money. It is easier to abuse an item than a

person; therefore, by degrading victims of sex trafficking, predators may view their actions as customary or reasonable. This indicates that dehumanizing a child makes it simpler to commercialize that child. Women are depicted as younger and younger in several industries, such as advertising. Consequently, sexual attraction to children is tolerated, if not normalized, by significant parts of our society (Breger, 2021, pp. 169-173).

The following are some of the potential benefits of norm and value reform in reducing violence against children:

- Reduced acceptance of violence against women and children
- Reductions in early and forced marriage
- More favourable beliefs towards gender equity and gender-equitable division of labour
- More favourable attitudes to non-violent approaches to parental discipline
- Greater recognition of what constitutes abusive behaviour towards intimate partners and children
- Increased bystander intervention to prevent violence against children and intimate partners
- Reductions in physical or sexual violence by a parent or intimate partner

Figure 16. Potential Effects of Norms and Value Change on Reducing Violence Against Children

Changing societal norms would help reduce the risk of commercial child exploitation. Moreover, it may encourage other nations to do the same, significantly decreasing child sex trafficking and normalizing pedophilia and sexual violence worldwide.

6.2.b Education and Life Skills

A unique approach that few policies encompass focuses on a child's education and life skills rather than solely on law enforcement strategies. Another one of INSPIRE's objectives is to "increase children's access to more effective, gender-equitable education and social-emotional learning and life-skills training, and ensure that school's environments are safe and enabling" (INSPIRE Seven Strategies for Ending Violence against Children, 2016). Improvements in education protect against both the victimization and perpetration of specific types of violence, such as childhood sexual violence, teenage violence, and intimate-relationship violence, all risk

factors for sex trafficking. The following are some of the possible positive effects of increasing education and the number of life skills taught to minors:

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|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases in school attendance and academic success • Reductions in child marriage • Reductions in sexual assault • Reductions in physical and sexual intimate partner violence victimization and perpetration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowers girls and boys to recognize and protect themselves against intimate partner violence • Reductions in aggressive and violent behaviours • Reductions in drug use and excessive alcohol use • Reductions in bullying behaviours |
|---|---|

Figure 17. Potential Effects of Education and Life Skills

“Schools offer an important space where children, teachers and education personnel can learn and adopt pro-social behaviours that can contribute to preventing violence within the school and in the community. Life skills training can prevent violence against children by enhancing their communication, conflict management and problem solving skills, and assisting them to build positive peer-to-peer relationships” (INSPIRE Seven Strategies for Ending Violence against Children, 2016). If it is possible to raise awareness about child sex trafficking and commercial exploitation and explain to minors what to do if they are ever in an unsafe situation or one that can turn into an unsafe one, it is imperative. Frequently, sex trafficking can be prevented by reducing the number of exploitative positions children are in or the unhealthy, dangerous ways they use social media.

6.3 Disadvantages

6.3a Reducing Demand for Child Pornography

As long as there is a potential to make revenue in this sector of forced child labor, there will be a continued desire and demand to produce and procure child sexual abuse materials. No country is immune from individuals who seek to sexually exploit children. While most policies focus on the intervention aspects, more policies need to focus on the detection of traffickers and consumers, preventing exploitation from the very beginning. The seven INSPIRE initiatives do

not attempt to discuss what can be done to locate consumers and link them back to traffickers, focusing instead on the moral and cultural components of *Ending Violence Against Children*.

According to *What Is Fueling the Demand for Child Sex Trafficking?* (2014), “One school of thought evaluating the origins of exploitive behavior is premised upon the idea that molesters were themselves molested.” There is compelling evidence of a link between childhood abuse and becoming a child molester later in life. Typically, this occurs due to a lack of control



Figure 18. *Connecting People on the Internet, Social Network Connection*

over their upbringing. These former victims grow up and seek ways to take the innocence of other children to regain control of what was stolen from them. In doing so, the abused becomes the perpetrator (What Is Fueling the

Demand for Child Sex Trafficking, 2014). As

stated above, INSPIRE focuses on changing societal norms and preventing child sexual abuse, which can diminish the number of people who become sex traffickers, molesters, or recipients/procurers of exploitative material. However, while still being extremely difficult, the government can now connect the recipients of child sexual abuse material to traffickers because of advances in digital forensics; thus, more efforts should be made to do so.

6.3b Responses to Online Abuse

A significant concern is the exponential growth of the virtual realm, making CSEC increasingly universal. The buying and selling of human beings have become as simple as hitting a button. This policy fails to address the growing online mutations in which videos and photographs are privately exchanged or appear on public sites such as PornHub, Backpage, Modelhub, CityXGuide, and Snapchat. These platforms have simplified the process for

traffickers to find victims and sell their products. “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” (European Commission, 2020). In



Figure 19. *What does the Dark Web Look Like?*

addition, payment methods becoming practically untraceable make it virtually impossible for the authorities to rescue or track victims and arrest perpetrators.

Moreover, on apps such as Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter, traffickers can ‘friend’ and ‘follow’ potential victims based on a user’s current and previous relationships, which might lead them to susceptible victims. As previously stated, many victims are subsequently forced or coerced into prostitution or persuaded with false promises of employment and aid (Sznitka, 2018). This is done by gaining the victim’s trust through social media via intimate relationships, promises of meeting in person, or simply through hookup culture.

Over half of all minors have had sexual intercourse before age 18, and hookup culture has become increasingly prominent in today’s society. A hookup or a one-night stand can involve any form of sexual intimacy in which, more often than not, the members have no emotional relationship, which can increase the risk of abuse. A trafficker can entice a ‘willing’ minor to have sexual intercourse for one night before kidnapping, sexually exploiting, and turning them into a victim of child sex trafficking. As with grooming, the nature of social media entails concealing certain information about oneself, allowing traffickers easy access to their targets, and perpetuating the cycle of sexual exploitation. Education about digital safety and harsher

policies regarding the content of online sites is crucial to reducing the number of sexually exploited minors online. Although the INSPIRE outlines are a step in the right direction, much must be done before sex trafficking is eradicated.

6.4 Comparison & Feasibility

Efforts to eliminate child sexual abuse and exploitation and support affected children will fail unless they are founded on what they demand and require, which involves continual efforts to encourage children's active participation in policy-making. "There are many gaps and challenges to confront including: broadening the focus on perpetrators, prevention for young people with harmful behavior, effective responses to online abuse, reaching all children: all of which require building on strengths in the informal sector" (INSPIRE Seven Strategies for Ending Violence against Children, 2016). INSPIRE is the most comprehensive of the options, as it highlights all of the needs of a child and what is needed to satisfy them and protect the child. It is possible for a nation, and perhaps even the entire globe, to apply these techniques and develop policies based on evidence-based approaches that have been demonstrated to be successful.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

Child sex trafficking and the commercial exploitation of minors is an ever-growing issue that requires immediate action. Sex trafficking is no longer isolated to one sector of the world; it has become an international crisis affecting all towns, countries, and continents and shows no signs of dying. Many traffickers believe the internet protects them and allows them to avoid prosecution. They can encrypt evidence and employ difficult-to-trace wireless technologies, making it easier to operate and 'recruit' children without being detected. The internet can be used to connect with other abusers, such as by networking among pimps or child pornography rings,

and for commercial components of trafficking, such as internet banking and purchasing clothes and other commodities for victims. It can also aid in finding clientele seeking children in prostitution and scouting other victims who will be forced into prostitution or pornography. The increasing use of social media creates a never-ending cycle of abuse and exploitation that is becoming increasingly harder for law enforcement to track (European Commission, 2020).

Child sex trafficking and commercial exploitation violate children's human rights. They are a public health issue with profound implications for world health and development (United Nations Children's Fund, 2020). Victims of abuse experience feelings of isolation, anxiety, and distrust, which can have long-term psychological implications. These may include low self-esteem, depression, and difficulty developing and sustaining healthy relationships and friendships. It can also impact their future relationships with their children, how they view others and themselves, what they consider healthy and safe sex, and blur the lines between consensual and non-consensual sexual relations. Child trafficking and exploitation can also have various economic implications. Child Sex Tourism (CST) refers to those who travel from one country to another to engage in commercial sex activities with minors. "Child sex tourism is a serious problem, with child sex tourists arriving mostly from the United States and Europe" (US State Department, 2020). This supports human trafficking by creating demand for the exploitation of children in the sex industry. To date, sex trafficking is one of the most profitable illicit industries. While society may feel that the only economic effect is a loss of economic revenue due to lower trade or sex tourism, this is not the case. In reality, the victims of child exploitation may eventually face financial hardship, housing issues, and drug/alcohol "debt" (The Impact of Child Exploitation, n.d.). These can be mitigated with helpful intervention and care policies integrating trauma-centered care and promoting long-term economic development and community stability.

Specific demographics are at a higher risk of being exploited than others. Perpetrators exploit children by taking advantage of those who are most vulnerable. This is due to a multitude of factors, including their age, physical fitness, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, intellectual capacity, and access to economic or other resources. Other risk factors include child marriage, unaccompanied foreign minors, drug abuse, and residing in a residential care facility. Minors who have been sexually abused or subjected to other types of violence in their families, as well as those who are marginalized, are more susceptible to exploitation and trafficking. While policies have been put in place to prevent and intervene in cases of exploitation, there is still much to be done with revising them to create a comprehensive response to all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse.

7.2 Policy Recommendations

1. Strengthening Multi-Stakeholder Cooperation

It is incredibly hard to combat sex trafficking and exploitation as it requires cooperation from multiple countries and involves overlapping jurisdictions. While no crossing of borders must physically occur for it to be considered sex trafficking, perpetrators will often move around with their victims to avoid detection and bring in the most clientele. Requiring nations to work together and even create international databases to store information about offenders and trafficking or pornography rings will ensure that these crimes are better identified, tracked, and prosecuted across borders. Policies encompassing this are more effective in identifying missing children and combating exploitation.

2. Focus on Demand Reduction

With many countries having normalized the sexualization of children, particularly young girls, it is essential to change societal norms around the sexual exploitation of children. Societal

norms can influence public attitudes and behavior and either promote or discourage the exploitation of children. Stopping the sexualization of young girls in our media, and children in general may ultimately reduce the demand for child sexual abuse material.

The next step would be addressing child pornography, as there is a strong correlation between it and child sex trafficking. The production and distribution of child pornography increases the demand for victims and the demand for in-person sexual relationships, thus increasing the rates of child sex trafficking. Without an opportunity for profit, there would be no motive for traffickers to exploit and sell children. That being said, working to disrupt the black market and decrease the profitability of child sex trafficking will reduce the number of children trafficked and exploited (Webmaster, 2022).

3. Integrate Children's Voices in Policy Making

The effectiveness of policies addressing child sex trafficking and commercial exploitation can significantly be improved by including children's voices in the decision-making process. According to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children can and should freely express their opinions in all areas affecting them. It also states that the child's viewpoints should be given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity (United Nations, 1989). Children have a unique view of the world and sexual abuse, which allows policies to be tailored to best protect and support them. In addition, children who have been victims have a unique perspective on the subject that people who have not experienced exploitation do not have. They can provide insight into traffickers' strategies, how law enforcement should have responded, and the impact trafficking has on their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. When designing a policy encompassing prevention, intervention, and protection, these must be considered. By involving children in the policy-making process,

policymakers can ensure that the policies are responsive to the needs of the children they are designed to protect. They are directly affected by policies related to trafficking and exploitation; thus, it is crucial to consider them in the policy-making process.

7.3 Concluding Remarks

Europe has become a hotspot for child sex trafficking and the commercial exploitation of minors. The scale of the problem is alarming, with an increasing amount of child sexual abuse material being detected and various states becoming known as transit countries. The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) found that nearly nine out of ten (89%) identified URLs containing child sexual abuse content came out of Europe: a concerning high amount, considering only approximately 10% of the world's population lives in Europe. Children as young as infants are subjected to trafficking and exploitation, which violates their human rights. Child sexual abuse has various psychosocial implications, and without proper preventive and protective measures, the effects can be long-lasting and devastating. It can impact the child's physical and mental health, relationships, and overall well-being for years to come.

The gravity of the situation is amplified by the fact that human rights violations are both a cause and a result of human trafficking. Human rights include the right not to be subjected to torture and cruel, degrading treatment and the right not to be subjected to slavery, forced labor, or bonded labor, both occurring in sex trafficking and commercial exploitation. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) emphasizes the importance of childhood as a distinct stage of life. Children should not be required to take on adult responsibilities or burdens but should be allowed to enjoy their childhood. Given the grave repercussions of child sex trafficking and commercial exploitation, protecting and promoting human rights must be at the forefront of the fight against child abuse.

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