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Official report of debates

Opening of the Sitting num 14

Debate: The protection of children against online violence

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Good morning.

Could delegates, please, take their seats, please.

The first item of business this morning is the debate on the report titled “The protection of children against online violence”, Document 15954, presented by Mr Joseph O'REILLY on behalf of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development.

I call Mr Joseph O'REILLY.

You have 7 minutes now and 3 minutes at the end to reply.

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): Thank you, President.

Without doubt, the internet represents tremendous opportunities for children as a source of knowledge, a tool of communication, and a springboard of creativity. It can help open the windows of wonder for our children.

What we must address today is that this is not the full story.

Sadly, the internet has also become a breeding ground and a conduit for violence, exploitation and abuse.

This Assembly has already sounded the alarm on the urgent need to shield our children from the perils lurking in the cyberspace.

With the proliferation of online dangers, exacerbated by our post-Covid online world, we must take bold and decisive action to protect our children against digital dangers. We must recognise the magnitude of the threat our children face.

They are increasingly exposed to various forms of online violence from a tender age, with devastating consequences.

The exponential rise in internet usage during the Covid-19 lockdowns has only increased this great peril, exposing our children to age inappropriate content and behaviours.

In this report:

1. Speeches in English, French, German and Italian are reported in full in English.
2. Speeches in other languages are summarised from the interpretation and indicated by an asterisk (*).
3. Speeches in German and Italian are available in full on the Assembly's website.
4. The text of the amendments is available at the document centre and on the Assembly's website. Only oral amendments or oral sub-amendments are reproduced in the report of debates.
5. Corrections should be handed in at Room 1081 not later than 24 hours after the report has been published.

Creating a safe online environment demands a comprehensive approach that prioritises the best interests of the child above all else.

This report calls for the establishment of a legal framework that strikes a delicate balance between minimising exposure to harm while enabling a child's legitimate exposure to the internet and the sacrosanct principal of freedom of expression – which can never be compromised.

Member states must rise to the occasion and implement effective age verification measures on websites, particularly those catering for adults or publishing disturbing material.

Our children's safety must take precedence over all other considerations. However, safeguarding our children goes beyond just age verification. It requires proactive measures to educate and empower both children, parents and caregivers in navigating the digital landscape safely.

By fostering a culture of digital literacy and resilience, we can empower our children to harness the full potential of the internet while mitigating the risks posed by violence online.

We must provide parents and caregivers with the knowledge and support needed to detect and combat online exploitation and abuse.

Specific measures must be enacted to shield young children from premature exposure to digital dangers. This includes robust educational programmes in schools and to schools, promoting peer-to-peer interlocutors, and parental involvement, and of course caregivers.

Empowering our frontline defenders – parents and caregivers – is paramount to winning this battle.

In our fight against online sexual exploitation, we must employ cutting-edge tools and technologies. Hash databases bolstered by cyber security measures can expedite the identification and apprehension of perpetrators while providing much needed support to victims.

Additionally, comprehensive sexuality education covering online dating and relationships of all orientations is essential in countering portrayals of violence and promoting healthy relationships.

We must equip our children with the knowledge and the tools to navigate the digital landscape safely.

Moreover, we must work with digital companies that run the digital world. Collaboration is imperative in developing adaptable and sustainable solutions to protect children online.

Where companies are acting criminally, then the full rigours of the law must be applied. It is our job as legislators to make sure those laws are in place.

Tech companies must accept their responsibilities by integrating safety and privacy into their products and services. We cannot afford to let our children's mental health and safety be at the whim of Silicon Valley.

International cooperation is also vital in our quest to shield children from online violence. We must urge countries worldwide to accede to international treaties and mechanisms aimed at protecting children's rights. This includes joining conventions on sexual exploitation and cybercrime, such as the Lanzarote Convention and Budapest Convention, as well as participating in Interpol and CCSE databases.

The safety of our children knows no borders, and our actions must reflect that reality.

The internet is a vast landscape of endless possibilities and has become an integral part of our children's lives. Yet amidst its boundless possibilities lies a dark underbelly, a realm where our children are increasingly exposed to harm and exploitation. As near autonomous actors in the digital realm our children navigate a complex landscape fraught with risks and dangers. It's imperative that we equipped them with the knowledge and skills to navigate this terrain safely.

To conclude, the protection of our children against online violence is a shared responsibility. One that demands unwavering commitment and collective action.

By working together, we can build a digital landscape where our children can explore, learn and grow without harm. Our children deserve nothing less. This report seeks to create such an environment.

I will respond to amendments as they arise and to comments later at the conclusion, comments that may arise from the floor.

I hope you can adopt the report, and indeed follow up its adoption by ensuring that your own states, your own governments, have robust legislation and penalties in place.

We must also work to ensure that our Council of Ministers gives effect to the report's recommendations.

I commend the report to the Assembly and look forward to your contributions.

Thank you.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Joseph O'REILLY.

May I remind delegates that you have 3 minutes to speak.

Now I am calling the speakers on behalf of the political groups.

The first speaker is Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO.

Please take the floor.

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO (Spain, SOC, Spokesperson for the group)*: Thank you. Thank you, Mister President.

Our heartfelt congratulations on such a relevant and topical report. Online violence against children is a serious problem that can have devastating consequences for their emotional and psychological well-being.

Young people are the group amongst the population who have had the most adverse effects on their mental health since the pandemic. New forms of online harassment, hate, and violence, as well as earlier and earlier access to pornography, new forms of addiction on social networks and online gambling mean that children and young people need proper and emotional preparation to allow them to interact responsibly to these new threats and conflicts, which are inherent in the new technological and post-pandemic age.

The internet has other significant risks for children. It exposes children to pornography. Just to give you one example, in my own country, 53% of children under 12 have seen pornographic content online unwittingly. And 70% of young people between the ages of 13 and 17 access pornography on a frequent basis. However, only nine out of 10 parents are aware of the situation. The consequences are serious. There has been an increase in sexual violence amongst young people, in sexting, and in cyberbullying. There are actual and alarming cases, which must not go under the radar.

None of this is coincidental or isolated from what goes on in society. That is why we must raise young people's awareness on how to protect themselves online and foster an environment of trust, a safe space for them where they can talk about any negative experiences they might have on the internet.

Pornography is not the only problem. More than 75% of young people are unable to distinguish a true news story from a fake one. They lack critical training for surfing the internet. Children and young people become prey to manipulation in the case of extreme hate speech and undemocratic stances and which seriously jeopardise the future for a public-minded and democratic citizenry, because young people's abstentionism and support for anti-politics are on the rise.

It's time to act to criminalise the digital providers' harmful practices and regulate children's access to certain types of content and to speed up a holistic response to protecting young people and children, particularly the most vulnerable children due to their economic and cultural poverty.

It is vital to address mental health and emotional well-being strategies for young people, to respond to new addictions and to develop sex education methods and content. Naturally, we need an educational strategy that inspires critical thinking, a means to prevent the spread of fake news, and a democratic education for well-being and coexistence amongst peers, emotional and affective education at all educational stages, teacher training, strengthening protocols against cyberbullying, student training in the proper use of artificial intelligence, and encouraging training for parents. I think by working together, we can work to prevent and combat online violence against children.

Thank you.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam MARTINEZ SEIJO.

I now call Mr Jan Filip LIBICKI.

Mr Jan Filip LIBICKI (Poland, EPP/CD, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, Mister Chair.

Mister Chair,

Dear colleagues,

First of all that I would like to say that I am really honoured that, on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party, I can say a few words about the report by my friend Mr Joseph O'REILLY about the protection of the children against violence in digital environment.

There is a lot of interesting remarks on Joseph's report, but for lack of the time I would like to stress on the remarks that seem very and really important for me.

Firstly, protecting children from the violence in the digital environment requires urgent and decisive action.

Secondly, it's important to find the right balance between children's right to communicate and gain knowledge from the internet and their effective protections against various forms of violence. We must act here really very carefully so that we will be effectively eliminating dangers, but we do not waste the opportunities that the digital environment offers us and especially for young people.

Certainly, the members states of the Council of Europe should develop a common legal framework for counteracting violence against children on the internet. An element of this framework should be effective verification of children's age when accessing content inappropriate for them.

Educating parents and guardians about the dangers posed by the digital environment and developing appropriate educational programs to sensitise children to the dangers posed by, for example, online dating, including declaring assertiveness.

I would like to add two more points.

Firstly, learning to distinguish between the true information obtained from the internet and the fake news information.

The second issue, particularly close to me, in a special way this defence mechanism should be taught to children with the disabilities, because for them, I know it from my own experience, the internet is here really great tool to equalise the opportunities. Also, because of this fact, children with disabilities are even more exposed to treating content obtained from the internet even more so uncritically.

Dear Mr Joseph O'REILLY, I am convinced that you are at the beginning of the way to effective protection of children against violence on the internet.

We are only taking the first step. You, as the author of this report, of this first step, will be remembered.

On behalf of the Group of the European People's Party, I want to thank you very much once again.

Thank you, Mister Chair.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister LIBICKI.

I now call Ms Olena KHOMENKO.

Ms Olena KHOMENKO (Ukraine, EC/DA, Spokesperson for the group): Hello colleagues,

Today we are united by a common goal to ensure the digital realm is a safe space for our children, not a dangerous one.

It's essential that our efforts to educate and raise awareness about online safety continue to evolve, especially in schools where the foundation of digital literacy is laid.

Education is the cornerstone of prevention.

We must implement comprehensive programmes that actively engage children, parents, and educators in understanding and navigating the complexities of the online world.

These programmes should focus on assertiveness, empathy, and critical thinking skills, empowering our young ones to recognise and respond to potential threats.

The role of parents and caregivers is crucial. At home, guardians must be equipped not just with knowledge but with effective tools to limit harmful exposure.

The endless scrolling on platforms like TikTok, which has been criticised for worsening mental health issues among the youth, highlights a critical need for vigilance.

Moreover, we must foster environments that encourage children to engage in meaningful activities beyond the digital sphere, reducing dependency on screens, and promoting mental and physical well-being.

Building trusting relationships that encourage open conversations about online experiences will be crucial in mitigating the risks associated with digital engagement.

I would also like to stress the importance and the urgent need for cross-border collaboration to counteract child labour and sexual exploitation more effectively.

It is an especially pressing issue in terms of large numbers of children who had to flee their countries because of armed conflicts and become highly vulnerable to such kinds of exploitation and abuse. Those are children of Ukraine, who faced displacement to the Council of Europe member states, or are subject of abduction by the Russian Federation on the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

It is imperative, dear colleagues, that we ensure practical cooperation, for instance by setting up databases to identify and locate children subjected to sexual exploitation or abuse, apprehend perpetrators, and provide child victims with the necessary psychological support and rehabilitative care.

As we move forward, let us remember that the interest of the child are of utmost importance.

Our actions today will determine the safety of our digital future. It is our duty and moral obligation to protect our youngest citizens from the shadows of exploitation and abuse that lurk behind the screens.

Together let us pledge to create a digital environment where children can thrive safely and securely, bolstered by education, protected by law and supported by a community committed to their well-being.

Thank you, dear colleagues.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Madam Olena KHOMENKO.

I now call Ms Sona GHAZARYAN from Armenia.

Ms Sona GHAZARYAN (Armenia, ALDE, Spokesperson for the group): Thank you, honourable Chair.

Dear rapporteur,

First of all I'd like to thank you, as a mother of a three year old girl, and then as a delegate to this Assembly.

Indeed, this is a very important topic to be touched upon.

Sometimes, just a click can lead a child into the best forest of data that will shape the kid forever. We must ensure that strong security measures within the educational system are there to protect them, while also creating a space where they can feel safe to express themselves.

There is not denying that the internet offers countless opportunities serving as a hub of information. However, it also poses risks to mental health and opens avenues for abuse, especially when children lack proper education on its safe usage.

Platforms like TikTok and Instagram change the kid from a user into a content developer. Introducing new challenges such as the misuse of AI and the potential for unwitting exposure to sexual violence.

Additionally, I would like to highlight a very serious problem that I think was ignored. The danger of photo and video filters on social media.

While they seem harmless, they can have a profound effect on children's mental health and well-being by promoting unrealistic beauty standards, fostering a culture of comparison, and distorting their perception of reality.

As these roles involved, I mean the the role of a user and the role of a content creator, we must establish a framework and legal system to not only deliver non-harmful content, but also safe spaces for children to voice up their own vision and opinions.

It is indeed very alarming that around 80% of children across 25 countries report feeling at risk of sexual abuse or exploitation online.

I think we need to speak more about this and find the ways to overcome the challenge.

Another point I would like to highlight here. When we had the discussion in the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, we spoke about also options for kids in Netflix and YouTube, and we as parents, why we thought that Netflix and YouTube created safe environments for our kids to dig into.

Apparently they are not safe enough, and there is space for improvement in terms of safety.

Therefore, it is essential to work with Netflix and YouTube and such organisations to maximise their benefits.

Agreeing with the report, the only solution is to engage in a dialogue with children about issues like sexual abuse, violence, bullying, and suicide-related content.

It is very evident for me that a single country cannot tackle this issue and challenges alone. Therefore I strongly believe that we need international regulations together, and of course, education and literacy are the only keys to this solution.

Thank you.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I now call Ms Sevilay ÇELENK ÖZEN.

Ms Sevilay ÇELENK ÖZEN (Türkiye, UEL, Spokesperson for the group): Dear Mister President,

Honourable colleagues,

Thank you for this important report and thank you to the previous speakers.

The technical and informative aspects of the subject are already discussed very well. I would like to focus on another aspect of the issue. It is a very valuable virtue to be able to care about the life of someone else's child without worrying about their social class, their ethnic identity or their religion, and without thinking that they are age, their smile, their face resembles your own child, even if you do not have a child. Because the lost lives of all children are precious and all children who lost their lives are worth mourning.

I believe that no one who speaks here today on the subject should pass by without mentioning the children of Gaza. Otherwise, history definitely condemns and judges us. History asked what did we talk about while children were dying in Gaza, in Rojava, in Ukraine. History asks what it means to talk about some of them for days and hours but not mention others even with a single word as if they were completely invisible. We should all make sure that these invisible dead children, along with history, will one day knock on our doors and as the famous Turkish poet Nâzım Hikmet says on behalf of a seven-year-old girl, "It is me knocking at your door. At how many doors have I been, but no one can see me, since the dead are invisible."

In November, a group of children in Gaza declared, "We have come to call as children, we call on all of you to protect us to stop the death. We want life. We want peace. We want the murderers to be brought to justice. We want medicine. We want food. We want education. We want life. We want the world to do something and stop the Israeli attacks. We want to live like other children."

I would like to say that we hear them. I want to say that we continue to see these children even though some of them are no longer alive.

The issue of protecting children from online violence is closely and inextricably linked to the issue of protecting children in real life. It is impossible to protect children in a world full of violence, conflict and war. States and governments have a duty to make the digital environment a safe and liberating environment for children. The most basic measures to protect children from violence can be found in media literacy and digital media literacy for children, establishing rights-based child-friendly reporting, notification and blocking procedures and ensuring effective implementation.

Let us work together to find a way forward that prioritises the protection, safety and well-being of children.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I now call Ms Valérie PILLER CARRARD.

Ms Valérie PILLER CARRARD (Switzerland, SOC): Thank you, Mr President.

Dear colleagues,

Rapporteur,

Protecting children from online violence is one of the priorities of our Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development. I would therefore like to thank Mr Joseph O'REILLY very much for his hard work on this report.

As the mother of three children who are taking their first independent steps on the Internet, I feel all the more concerned by this issue and expect us to take concrete action to protect our children.

The report on protecting children from online violence calls for a comprehensive legal framework to protect children in the digital environment. Particularly given the proliferation of dangers on the web and the emergence of new forms of online violence, a balanced approach is needed to reduce children's exposure to online harm, without encroaching on children's opportunities to benefit from the internet. In developing policy and measures, the best interests of the child must be paramount.

The draft resolution includes an invitation to member states to put in place a comprehensive legal framework, including at least an obligation for effective age verification on websites, particularly those providing products and content not intended for children, which would lead to similar measures in the offline world.

Children are increasingly being exposed to online pornography at an ever earlier age, a phenomenon accentuated by the pandemic that has led to increased use of smartphones by young people. Website providers need to be held responsible for the content they host, and moderate it proactively, for example with detection tools or specially trained units.

But of course, we also need to support and raise awareness among parents and caregivers, who are often unaware of how to detect online exploitation, abuse and violence. And, of course, we need to give them the means to intervene. Indeed, as parents, we are quickly overwhelmed by the speed at which online offerings develop.

What's more, we need to provide children with a comprehensive education on sexuality, including the issue of online dating and relationships. It is important to protect children from exposure to pornography, given its proven effects on behavior and development. Studies have shown, for example, that pornography consumption is significantly correlated with an increase in verbal and physical aggression.

Basically, to improve child protection, we need to involve all stakeholders: children, parents, caregivers, teachers, web providers and governments must work together to develop measures and policies to protect children.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I now call Mr Francesco VERDUCCI.

Mr Francesco VERDUCCI (Italy, SOC): Thank you President,

Let me say that I think it's very important that the stands of this chamber today are packed with so many girls and boys.

Online violence against minors is a abject crime, a vicious form of discrimination, a wound not just individual but collective. It strikes at an age when one is defenceless, and it is a plot from which it is difficult to get out. It constitutes a very serious impediment to growth and full personality development.

According to UNICEF, 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 13 boys globally are sexually exploited or abused by age 18, and in almost all cases there is an online implication.

The pandemic has accelerated this proliferation. Much of our daily activities have moved into cyberspace, exposing more and more people to harmful and dangerous content.

Digital platforms are chasing younger and younger users. And children have become a coveted market segment, and this is disturbing, this exposes them to a continuous mechanism of commercial capture that is itself a denial and violation of their rights.

Children are induced to be online a time that can potentially stretch indefinitely. All this has a deforming impact on the neurological and cognitive development of children. Who often find themselves – without having any knowledge of it – faced with countless forms of violence: online grooming, cyberbullying, extortion and sexual blackmail, online games, extreme *challenges*. Dynamics of violence that throw minors into a spiral of humiliation, isolation, identity crisis, self-harm.

And it happens more often than not that the trauma is so gigantic and the inhibition is such that the violence experienced is kept secret, from parents, from friends. And that leads to an underestimation of the phenomenon.

All the more important then, colleagues, is today's act. We have a duty and urgency to enact a code of strong and clear rules for platforms, to reaffirm the right to happiness of children and adolescents.

And to curb the misuse of technologies, we will have to, and we can, use the same new technologies, starting with artificial intelligence, which can be decisive in preventing these phenomena.

President,

I want to conclude by adding a point that I think is important: educational poverty and lack of digital education exponentially increase violence and discrimination.

Children at risk of exclusion and dropping out of school are the most affected.

We have a priority task: to invest in the right to education, to enable children – especially those from socially disadvantaged families – to have the tools of their own emancipation, their own citizenship, their own future.

Thank you.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you so much for that.

I now call Mr Georgios STAMATIS.

Mr Georgios STAMATIS (Greece, EPP/CD)*: Thank you, President.

At the close of this plenary session and before we return to our hemicycles, I think it is only right that we are raising the issue of the protection of children against online violence. They are, after all, our future citizens, who will in turn be founding their families. So it is very right that we are speaking out on this subject.

Mr Francesco VERDUCCI talked about poverty, and I think rightly so, because poverty is the beginning when talking about a phenomenon such as this.

I think that we need to be working together with parents, educating parents when it comes to the online environment. We need to give society the tools that are required.

We need to ensure a better quality of life, and I think that we need to be talking about solidarity.

Before being a parliamentarian, I was involved with looking after Ukrainian children arriving in Greece. I think what we need to do is to create the conditions to enable children to have safe access to internet so that they are not going to be exploited as a result of their vulnerability or the fact that they find themselves in a foreign country.

I am glad that this report sends a strong message to our leaders when it comes to what is required in order to accompany the new technologies, artificial intelligence, whilst at the same time protecting children in a safe environment. An environment which is competitive, certainly, but it has to be an environment that enables us to protect our democratic values and shore up the state based on the rule of law.

It's in this way that children can be protected from the adverse effects of technologies and their development.

Politics has got to be a step ahead of technology. It is our duty, our obligation, to be one step ahead. I think we need to lay down the ground rules so that all can grow up in an environment which is safe and one of wellbeing.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I now call Ms Minna REIJONEN.

Ms Minna REIJONEN (Finland, EC/DA): Thank you, Mister President,

Dear colleagues,

I would like to thank the rapporteur for this important report on protecting children against online violence. The Internet is both good and bad at the same time. Today children use mobile phones a lot. Even very young children can use the internet and mobile phones. They really carry around disturbing content, bullying, and violence in their pockets.

But are mobile phones really needed at school? I think, no.

Supervision is needed and the children's parents must be active.

This discussion has taken place in Finland, too.

A study was conducted, and it showed that as many as three out of four Finns support banning cell phones in schools.

In Finland the government programme includes pushing for a law change enabling the ban on cellphones. I think it is good.

In my opinion this law should be strongly promoted. There should be no mobile phones at school.

Social media is not good for very young children. If you have a mobile phone, you have easy access to the Internet, too.

Adults should set an example for children. It would also be good for adults to limit their use of social media at work, for example.

In my own childhood it was also good that there was no social media or internet yet. Children should play and be active, not stare at screens.

Of course, the Internet is all in all a good and progressive thing. However, it is important to ensure that children are allowed to be children.

Thank you.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I call now Ms Franziska HOOP.

Ms Franziska HOOP (Liechtenstein, ALDE): Dear Chairman,

Dear colleagues,

I would like to begin by thanking Mr Joseph O'REILLY for drafting this report. I believe we all agree that children must be given their own status in our society due to their particular vulnerability and needs. Their protection must, therefore, also be guaranteed in a special way online.

The Council of Europe offers relevant legal frameworks in this area, such as the European Convention on Human Rights and the Lanzarote Convention. The Council of Europe Convention on Artificial Intelligence, which is expected to be adopted during the next session of the Committee of Ministers in May, is an important addition in this area. I therefore hope that as many states as possible will ratify the convention.

However, compliance with the legal framework is just as important. Online platforms, especially social media, have a particular responsibility here. Harmful content must be deleted in a more targeted manner and comments must be moderated more competently. Algorithms must not be allowed to forward such content, especially not to our children. Influential companies must also comply with the law and should be held accountable for violations.

Thank you very much.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I now call Ms Gwen BONIFACE.

Ms Gwen BONIFACE (Canada): Honourable colleagues,

Online activities are borderless, and the resolution in Mr Joseph O'REILLY's report rightly insists on the importance of international and cross-border co-operation in protecting children from online violence.

This is a challenge for all of us, and particularly for investigators and prosecutors.

From that premise, I would like to offer a Canadian perspective.

In Canada, criminal law prohibits all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation and makes it illegal to possess, access, make, and distribute all forms of child pornography.

Despite sanctions for these crimes, over 15 000 cases of online sexual offences against children and almost 46 000 cases of online child pornography were reported by the police between 2014 and 2022, in Canada. And these are just the recorded cases.

In fact, the overall rate of cases of online child sexual exploitation reported by the police has increased since 2014, reaching 160 cases per 100 000 Canadian children and youth in 2022.

Additional measures are needed to better protect Canadian children from online violence and to prosecute those who engage in such activities.

Last February, the government of Canada introduced a bill to enact a new Online Harms Act, whose purpose is to, among other things, promote online safety, reduce harms caused by certain content available online, and ensure that the operators of social media services are transparent and accountable.

To that end, the new Act would impose certain duties on social media service operators, such as a duty to act responsibly, a duty to protect children, and a duty to make content that sexually victimises children inaccessible.

There is another legislative proposal dealing with online harms before the Canadian Parliament at present, this one tabled by a senator.

The Bill restricts young persons' online access to sexually explicit material, and would make it an offence for organisations to make sexually explicit material available to young persons on the Internet, among other measures.

It would impose an obligation to implement a prescribed age verification method.

In this respect, the bill is in line with the report's resolution.

While these different proposals are still being considered in the Canadian Parliament, I am very interested in hearing proposals from your countries.

I am convinced that the present debate will help us improve our approach worldwide, and that increasing international co-operation will result in better protection for children. Not just in Canada, but around the globe.

Honourable colleagues, let's do this together.

Thank you.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I now call Mr Yuriy KAMELCHUK.

Mr Yuriy KAMELCHUK (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Thank you.

Dear Chairman,

Dear colleagues,

Thank you, Mr Joseph O'REILLY, for this important report.

It's evident that our collective goal is to ensure the effective protection of children online. This requires a comprehensive approach involving all stakeholders: state, the technology sector, parents and children themselves.

We must transition from a continuum of online violence to one of robust protection, always prioritising the best interests of the child.

We acknowledge that achieving full safety online is a gradual process, especially as technology advances. Therefore, we must continuously review and adapt our measures to address new challenges. Beginning with updating national legislation and aligning with human rights standards, including robust protection for children online and proper age verification on websites.

Moreover, awareness-raising campaigns and digital literacy initiatives are crucial for empowering children and their caregivers. We must harness the potential of advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence, to enhance prevention, detection and removal of harmful content.

As children's online engagement grows, so too must our efforts to safeguard them. The Council of Europe is poised to lead in the endeavour, drawing on its expertise in children's rights, and technology-related legal frameworks.

I urge the Assembly to recommend that members states review and update their legislation, collaborate with relevant stakeholders and address emerging threats such as harmful deep fakes. Furthermore, the Committee of Ministers should prioritise online child protection in its work, and strengthen cooperation with the technology industry. It's imperative that we force collaboration not only among members states, but also with all relevant stakeholders, especially the technology sector.

A child-friendly support system must be created to provide a safe haven for children navigating the online world. Furthermore, we must remain vigilant against emerging forms of online violence, including the insidious threat of harmful deep fakes, and develop strategies to counter them effectively.

Let us unite in our commitment to protect the most vulnerable among us and ensure that every child can explore the digital realm with confidence and security.

Thank you.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Yuriy KAMELCHUK.

I now call Ms Pelin YILIK.

Ms Pelin YILIK (Türkiye, NR): Thank you, Mister President.

Dear colleagues.

I would like to thank the rapporteur for his reports which highlight important points concerning protecting children against online violence.

The internet is the most widely used communication tool in the world and it is estimated that one in every three internet users is under 18. While the internet offers many opportunities for children to access information, it also presents unique challenges and threats.

As stated in the report, risks and threats that children may be exposed to on the internet have been classified into four categories: content, contact, conduct and commerce or contract. These are known as the four Cs of online safety.

Dear colleagues, families are the first line of protection for children and young people generally, but given that often they are not equally equipped to manage this task.

Here, I would also like to talk all about advertising activities that might that may pose a danger to children as a kind of commerce risk. Advertising activities for children and young people is a multi-billion dollar industry. The advertisements that children encounter in the digital space are generated by algorithms and include many innovative persuasive communication activities.

On the other hand, violence against children is a pervasive phenomenon that knows no political, cultural, economic nor technological boundaries.

The boom in information and communication technologies over recent decades has brought completely new ways of establishing and maintaining relationships. This is a very normal everyday reality for many children and young people and an exciting possibility for the rest.

In very different ways, children are vulnerable to multiple forms of violence that threaten their physical and psychological integrity.

Governments must ensure that legislation on child pornography protects all children under the age of 18, regardless of the age of consent to sexual activity.

Finally, for this reason, it will be beneficial for member states to develop effective mechanisms to protect children from the negative persistent effects of violent content.

Thank you.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

Can I now call Ms Nicole HÖCHST?

Can you please put the microphone on?

Ms Nicole HÖCHST (Germany, EC/DA): Mr President,

Dear colleagues

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Internet is a colourful place – a world of its own that operates according to its own rules. You can travel in it and see wonderful things and learn many fascinating things. However, it is also a dark, dangerous place that you have to learn to navigate. Even for adults, it is not easy to evaluate the wealth of information and impressions available there and integrate them into reality.

Fake news, manipulation and brainwashing are dangers that the internet holds in store alongside crime. We know from radio and television and the studies that investigate the effectiveness of advertising that the former are also very real. Advertising catches your ear, stays in your head. The frequent repetition of advertising content reinforces internalisation.

As much as I support the will expressed in the resolution to protect children from all these dangers, I have to express my doubts that our states can or want to do this. Let me give you an example of why: a group of different scientists has set itself the goal of tracking down the lack of information on multisexuality in Germany. They found what they were looking for on public television. That's the state broadcaster, ladies and gentlemen. What is it like in your home countries? In our country, there are series explicitly for children that consistently deny bisexuality. There were also topics for children such as "pronouns" or "What's it like to make porn?" or "Drug and group anal sex" or disturbing reality-distorting opinion pieces with dubious figures about a hateful LGBTQ-hostile society. To me, this is sexual assault, grooming and child abuse. How can something like this be? It contradicts the Interstate Media Treaty, which states that content should be geared towards the reality of children and young people's lives.

With respect, for these reasons, I have little confidence or hope that the nation states can even offer a solution here. The only people who, in my opinion, could deal with the problem sensibly if they were informed are parents, educators and teachers. In order for children to grow up resilient, socially competent and physically and mentally healthy, the reality of the loving warmth of their family and their circle of friends and community is the best way to make children and young people immune to loneliness, indoctrination and other dangers in the virtual world.

Thank you very much.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I now call Mr Mehmet AKALIN.

Mr Mehmet AKALIN (Türkiye, ALDE): Thank you, Mister Chair,

Ladies and gentlemen, first of all I would like to thank the rapporteur for this extensive report and the recommendations.

We live in an age where the technological advancements have opened up a world of opportunities.

However, they have also exposed our children to unprecedented dangers, which in turn demands our urgent attention.

The rapid increase in digital violence towards children is a harsh reality that is leaving a profound impact on the lives of our youngest and most vulnerable citizens.

Mental health and well-being are severely compromised as a consequence of online violence, robbing our children of their sense of security.

Every offensive comment, every inappropriate image, and every malicious threat chips away at their innocence and erodes their confidence, causing long-term damage that may never fully heal.

It is our moral obligation to protect our children from harm both offline and online.

We must address the root causes that give rise to online violence, whether it is the rapid increase of harmful content, the lack of digital literacy and education, or the normalisation of toxic behaviour online.

Steps must be taken to invest into comprehensive education and awareness campaigns aimed at empowering all concerned with the knowledge and tools they need to navigate the digital landscape safely and responsibly.

Digital literacy education must be integrated into school curricula from an early age, teaching children how to identify and respond to online threats, protect their personal information, and seek help when needed.

As mentioned in the report, we must work collaboratively with technology companies and online platforms to develop and implement effective safeguard and moderation mechanisms.

This includes stringent content moderation policies, age verification measures, and technological solutions such as artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms to detect and remove harmful content.

Law enforcement agencies, technology companies, and sport groups must also work together to develop stringent mechanisms for identifying and prosecuting those who seek to harm our children.

Let us remember that the fight against online violence towards children is not a solitary battle, but a collective endeavour that requires the commitment and cooperation of all stakeholders.

We must protect the most vulnerable members of our society and ensure that the internet remains a place of opportunity, not a breeding ground for violence and exploitation.

Thank you.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I now call Ms Gabriela BENAVIDES COBOS.

Ms Gabriela BENAVIDES COBOS (Mexico)*: Thank you very much indeed.

I would like to congratulate Mr Joseph O'REILLY on presenting this resolution. We agree on the urgency of protecting our girls, boys and adolescents from online violence.

Mexico has worked on cybersecurity education, creating education programmes to teach children and teenagers about online risks, how to identify threats and how to protect their personal information. It contains measures to prevent cyberbullying and grooming, including the promotion of safe online behaviours and awareness of how to report situations of harassment or abuse, how to protect personal data, as well as guaranteeing measures to protect children's and adolescents' privacy online. It is not an easy task.

And along with other countries, Mexico is experiencing a delicate situation. On 7 November 2023, members of the Senate, along with representatives of technology firms, signed the National Pact for the Cybersecurity of Children and Adolescents, in which the parties committed to preventing, combatting and educating about those crimes to which these sectors of the population are vulnerable when browsing the internet or using social media or apps.

The legislators and tech companies, together, agreed that safe browsing is of crucial importance, since between 80% and 84% of young people between the ages of 12 to 17 in Mexico have access to it and 25% of them have experienced some form of cyberbullying.

Furthermore, national surveys and data from the United Nations Children's Fund show that this population group is more vulnerable to other risks such as data theft, fake news and so-called sexting, in which suggestive images are shared or viewed. And that is why we must redouble our efforts and bring in all branches of government, academia, the private sector and civil society not only to combat digital crimes, but also to make better use of digital technologies so they continue to help our children in other matters.

There are several bills before the Senate to regulate the internet, artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. We already have the federal law on the protection of personal data held by private parties and we need to extend the comprehensive legal framework in that area. Furthermore, it must force technology companies to include privacy in their services. And we, of course, will be awaiting the artificial intelligence convention. Parents are responsible for raising their children but it is also the state's responsibility to guarantee the protection of our children.

Thank you.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I now call Ms Iryna KONSTANKEVYCH.

Ms Iryna KONSTANKEVYCH (Ukraine, EC/DA): Dear President and colleagues,

The protection of children against violence in the digital environment is an issue that definitely requires our greatest attention and immediate actions. Especially under the circumstance of the current war in its different forms.

Today, children in the online space are not mere information recipients, but the most active participants. They widely use digital technologies in their everyday lives and for education.

Developing effective guarantees regarding the violation of children's rights online, for example violence against children and in particular sexual and psychological violence, and cyberbullying, is a matter of paramount importance in the modern globalised world.

In the meantime, the real lives of Ukrainian children are accompanied by even greater threats and challenges.

The Russian Federation is insidiously carrying out an operation not only on the battlefield, but also online.

Children are in their biggest focus.

Unfortunately, the Ukrainian experience proves that the occupants find ways on how to receive important data with the help of children in order to attack Ukraine. To take a photo of a sight or a military facility, or critical infrastructure, in exchange for a virtual prize or digital money. That's how the activities of Russia's special services are disguised as ordinary internet games or internet quests for Ukrainian children.

They also involve Ukrainian children in massive false reports of mining of schools, public authorities' buildings, implementing ways of influencing them, such as communication via social networks, different channels, games, platforms, mobile services, etc.

Ukraine is comprehensively working on fighting the violation of children's rights online and preventing violence in the digital environment like that from cyberbullies. The Ombudsman office of Ukraine is working to promptly identify suspicious children's channels on social networks and the internet.

At the same time, the issue being discussed in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe today is reaching a new powerful level, especially in view of the increasing danger online, a new form of online violence.

Thank you, dear colleagues.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

I now call Ms Olena MOSHENETS.

Ms Olena MOSHENETS (Ukraine, ALDE): Dear colleagues,

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mr Joseph O'REILLY for such an informative report.

The Internet is an essential part of our everyday life. It is a powerful tool with opportunities for child development, which unfortunately has become the largest environment for bullying. Every click is a challenge that threatens a happy childhood.

New and unpredictable risks are constantly growing. One in six teenagers has been a victim of cyber bullying. The rapid development of technology opens up wide opportunities for violations of the right to safety. The Internet users are getting younger and the internet more dangerous.

This problem is acutely relevant for Ukrainian children. Due to the constant danger, 24% of children study remotely. The evil is strengthened by the war. Minors are left face-to-face with fear online. As the most vulnerable part of our society spends more and more time in the digital network, suffering from Russian information, psychological operations, and the negative influence of ill wishers.

The scandalous youth community PMC "Redan" used the lack of communications among the teenagers to spread hatred and stereotypes on social media. As this led to the organisation of a mass riot with 200 minors in Kharkiv a year ago.

The life threatening online game "Blue Whale" has been around since 2016. An anonymous "curators" create trusting relationship, manipulate, threaten, and prepare introverted children for suicide.

These are the most striking example of Russian influence on children's minds through dubious online communities. The aggressor country kills children not only by regular shelling and torture, but also deliberately inflicts psychological suffering, leaving a deep mark on the minds of the generation.

We have no right to be indifferent. It is our duty to bring to justice all those involved in the existence of danger in the digital world especially accountable.

Ukraine has actively countered online threats. The first online portal "StopCrime" for reporting child sexual abuse has been operating for over a month. The Stop Sexting project, the chatbot "Cyberdog", and the educational series "Child Safety on the Internet for Parents" are a small part of the systematic work to ensure a safe environment in cyber space.

The shocking realities of the risk of the internet are difficult to comprehend. As the feeling of helplessness and defencelessness in the face of hidden violence destroys children's hearts. That's why protecting their rights online is not just a necessity: it is an imperative for the entire global community.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I now call Ms Nadejda IORDANOVA, from Bulgaria.

The next speaker is Mr Rostyslav TISTYK, from Ukraine.

Mr Rostyslav TISTYK (Ukraine, EC/DA): Mr President,

Dear colleagues,

Dear participants,

Today I would like to address you on an important and relevant topic: the protection of children against online violence.

The Internet plays a huge role in children's lives. It is a source of learning, entertainment and communication. However, along with many positive aspects, it also conceals threats, including violence.

Today, officially 25% of Ukrainian children are sexually abused and exploited online. Especially in times of war, protecting children from online violence becomes an even more urgent task. Unfortunately, war provokes an increase in virtual and real violence, especially among the most vulnerable members of society: children.

During military operations, children become particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of the Internet. They become targets of cyber bullying, hostile propaganda of violence and influenced by extremist and terrorist groups. In addition, war leads to the spread of fake news and disinformation, which jeopardises the safety of children in the virtual space.

In 2012, Ukraine ratified the Lanzarote Convention of the Council of Europe. We are bringing national legislation aligned with European standards, and much has already been done in that direction. In investigating crimes, our cyber police and all law enforcement agencies work closely with European countries. They constantly undergo training abroad, share experiences, and keep in touch with Interpol and the relevant European structures. In accordance with international standards, our legislation has been amended to provide that sexual crimes against children should be considered by the courts out of turn. Now, all conditions are being created to ensure that the interrogation of children is also carried out in accordance with the European requirements.

In times of war, we must join forces even more to protect the youngest in the virtual space. The joint work of parents, teachers and government institutions and NGOs, and the international community, will create a safe and supportive environment for the development of our children even in the most difficult times.

Ukraine will take all necessary measures to update its national legislation on human rights standards to improve the protection of children on the Internet.

May our joint actions results in every child having the opportunity to grow up in safety and harmony, even in the most difficult times of war.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr David MORRIS (United Kingdom, EC/DA, President of the Assembly): Thank you very much.

I now call Ms Larysa BILOZIR.

Ms Larysa BILOZIR (Ukraine, ALDE): Thank you, Mister President.

Honourable colleagues,

I would like to thank Mr Joseph O'REILLY for a thorough report, which highlights the critical importance of establishing a secure digital environment for our children.

Indeed, the internet has become a part of our life, offering unprecedented opportunities for learning, communication and entertainment, but at the same time it threatens the safety and well-being of our children. From cyberbullying, and exposure to inappropriate content, to addiction, that not only influences children's academic performance but also their physical and psychological health.

I support Mr Joseph O'REILLY's call for finding a balance between safeguarding children and respecting their rights. We are talking today about online violence and the rights of children to secure a digital environment. Simultaneously, the whole world is watching how online war in Ukraine and violence that violates the fundamental rights of Ukrainian children – the right to life, safety, education and medical care.

Ukrainian children study the war period of history not from the internet or books but from their own lives. Children are dying in their beds while sleeping, in maternity hospitals, in playgrounds and in cars during evacuation. They are injured in their homes and in the streets. The youngest victim was a two-day-old boy from Zaporizhzhia.

These days as we are gathered in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, adopting reports, Ukrainians are waiting for air defence, and this morning three children were killed in Dnipro. This spring, five children were killed in Odesa while sleeping in their beds: a nine-year-old, an eight-year-old, a three-year-old, eight-month-old Lisa and four-month-old Timothy were found under the rubble in the hands of their dead mothers.

And, actually, today, my one-year-old son was also all night in the bomb shelter not sleeping, as he is every day, in Kyiv – every day – several times he is going to the bomb shelter. As a mother of three children, I would like my children to have a future in Ukraine. And I would like them not to have panic attacks. But Russia has broken the childhood of Ukrainian children who are traumatised from one degree or another.

Dear friends, I call you to work together at the international and national level to protect children's rights, to create societies where children can thrive, express themselves and participate fully in the digital and the real world while being protected from war, harm and genocide.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Mr Roberto Juan MOYA CLEMENTE is next.

Mr Roberto Juan MOYA CLEMENTE (Mexico): Thank you, President.

Esteemed colleagues and dedicated advocates for the well-being of our global youth,

It is an honour to stand before you today to address the urgent issue of online violence against children.

In this digital era, where technology has erased borders and transformed our way of living, learning, and connecting, we are faced with a paradox of profound implications. The internet, a vast expanse of knowledge and opportunity, has also become a dark and perilous frontier for our children. The statistics are alarming. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children received in 2022 over 32 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation, illustrating a significant and heart-wrenching increase from the previous year.

Moreover, the internet-bound Watch Foundation's efforts in the same year unveiled more than 375 000 reports suspected of containing child sexual abuse imagery, verifying nearly 200 000 URLs as conduits of such unspeakable harm.

Let us remember, these are not mere numbers. Behind every statistic is a child, a life marred by trauma, a future cast under the shadow of exploitation. This is the harsh reality of our interconnected world. One in three internet users is a child, navigating online spaces that are as fraught with danger as they are filled with promise.

The digital divide further compounds this crisis. While 87% of children in high-income countries enjoy internet access at home, a mere 6% in low-income nations can say the same. This stark disparity not only impedes educational and social advancement but also obscures the true scale of online violence against children, rendering our efforts to combat it more challenging.

Nevertheless, there's hope. The Office for National Statistics in the United Kingdom has initiated a groundbreaking initiative to redefine how we understand and measure violence against children. By leveraging administrative data, we aim to paint a more accurate picture of the threats our children face. But this challenge cannot be tackled alone. We must form a unified front, a coalition of legislators, policymakers, educators, technologists, and civil society. Together, we can bridge the digital divide and ensure a safer digital landscape that is a safe haven, not a battleground.

In proposing a solution, we advocate for enhanced online safety education in schools, stricter regulations, and collaboration with technology companies to develop robust safeguards. Additionally, we call for increased international co-operation to combat online exploitation.

In closing, I extend my heartfelt gratitude for your attention and your dedication to this cause. Together, we can and must create a safer, more inclusive digital world for all our children.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Mr Oleksandr KOVALCHUK is next.

Mr Oleksandr KOVALCHUK (Ukraine, ALDE): Thank you, Mr President.

First and foremost I want to extend my gratitude to Mr Joseph O'REILLY, the rapporteur of this document, for his dedication and efforts in addressing such an urgent issue of protecting children from online violence.

On this significant occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, we are reminded of the enduring commitment to upholding human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

As a parent of four children – 5, 11, 15 and 27 – I have witnessed first-hand the evolving challenges our children face online. From my eldest, who navigates the digital world with relative ease, to my youngest, who is just beginning to explore the wonders of the internet, the dangers of online violence are ever present.

In Ukraine, where I came from, our children are exposed not only to the ordinary risks of the internet, but also to the harsh realities of ongoing war. They are confronted with brutal images of horror and violence on top of insidious attempts of our enemies to manipulate their minds and harm them, inexperienced and naive.

Despite these challenges, the resilience of Ukrainian children shines through, reminding us of the importance of protecting and supporting them in the digital world.

In today's technological age, protecting our children from online violence is not just a matter of rules and policies, it is a moral imperative rooted in our shared values of human dignity and freedom. As a member of PACE, we have a duty to ensure that our children can navigate the cyberspace safely and securely without fear of harm.

The challenges our children face online are universal, but so too is our resolve to address them. Let us draw on the collective wisdom and experience of our diverse membership to develop comprehensive and effective solutions. Let us empower parents and caregivers with the knowledge and tools they need to protect their children online. Let us strengthen international cooperation and dialogue to address the root causes of online violence. Let us reaffirm our commitment to promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law in all aspects of our work.

In closing, let us seize this opportunity to protect our children and uphold the values that define us as members of PACE. Together, let us build a safer more inclusive digital world for generations to come.

Finally, dear friends, there is some bad and good news, as always. The bad news, it is Friday, and we can go home but we could do much more than we did, we could accomplish more. And the good news, we can go home, it is Friday, and we can see our close friends and families and hug them, unlike my fellow Ukrainian soldiers who are working, protecting us 24/7, on the first line of war.

Let's pray and wish them to stay safe, alive, and to come home one day to celebrate our victory together.

God bless and thank you all.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Oleksandr.

Mr Brian FRANCIS is next.

Mr Brian FRANCIS (Canada): Honourable colleagues,

Mr Joseph O'REILLY's report reminds us of the great opportunities the internet provides children to learn, communicate and create. But it also reminds us of the serious risks online to their safety and well-being.

For Indigenous children in Canada, this is an issue of particular concern. That's where I'll focus my remarks today.

In June 2019, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls presented its final report. The report showed how "persistent and deliberate human and Indigenous rights violations and abuses are the root cause behind Canada's staggering rates of violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people."

Despite the work of the Inquiry, however, Indigenous women and girls are still 10 times more likely to be victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation than non-Indigenous women and girls in Canada.

And every day, the Internet facilitates this exploitation.

Predators use social media to groom and traffic Indigenous youth, whose vulnerability makes them targets. Social media also provides a platform to those who deny the genocide of Indigenous people in Canada, and the atrocities that took place in residential schools.

Residential schools, for those unaware in this chamber, operated in Canada for more than 160 years. They promoted racist assumptions about the inferiority of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. They deprived more than 150 000 Indigenous children of their culture and the love and care of their families. They subjected them to neglect and horrific abuse.

And we are still finding unmarked graves where Indigenous children were buried. But this is not history. The last residential school only closed in 1997.

After decades of fighting to be heard, believed, and supported, however, online hate and disinformation campaigns distort the facts. They prevent wounds from healing. They deny, reject, minimise, and even mock the truth. In short, they disrupt the reconciliation process between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

So, how do we address the online hate, distortion and exploitation I've raised today?

Legislative measures are essential, of course. But we also need to think outside the box.

In this respect, I would like to highlight the remarkable work done by Indigenous-led organisations. The Moose Hide Campaign is one example. This nationwide movement engages men and boys with the goal of ending violence towards women and children. And we need more initiatives like it. For Indigenous children, and for all children.

Wela'lin. Thank you. Merci.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister FRANCIS.

And that concludes the list of speakers.

So I will call now Mr Joseph O'REILLY to reply to the debate.

You have 3 minutes.

Mr Joseph O'REILLY (Ireland, EPP/CD, Rapporteur): Thank you.

Thank you, President.

At the outset, could I thank our colleague from the administration, Ms Jannick Devaux, for her extraordinary help and work on this and her eternal patience and courtesy?

Can I also thank all the contributors to the debate today?

It's not totally germane to the report, but may I at the outset acknowledge the very particular horrendous brutalisation, suffering, of children in both Ukraine and Gaza. Their suffering, their brutalisation, what they observe around them today, is way beyond anything we're discussing today.

I want to acknowledge that. It's arisen in a number of contributions from Ukrainian delegates who spoke in great numbers and who showed great interest in the debate, and indeed by a Turkish delegate in relation to Gaza.

Each are a horror. They are an affront to humanity. I think while it's not germane to the report, it's incumbent on us to acknowledge that pain, that suffering, that eternal horror.

Now, what I propose to do for the very short time I have is to sort of identify a few things that were said, just sequentially. I will run out of time, but the themes repeat themselves anyway.

Ms Luz MARTINEZ SEIJO, from Spain, identified that 53% of children had been exposed to dangerous photographic material. Shocking.

Mr Jan Filip LIBICKI, from Poland, who's a cousin of the distinguished Constance Markievicz, a great hero in Ireland, identified fake news as an issue and the need for children to be able to identify that.

Ms Olena KHOMENKO identified establishing trusting relationships and distinguishing between the wrong relationships.

Our delegate from a Poland, rather from Türkiye, identified the issue I spoke of already, and both delegates in relation to the Gaza children, etc.

Ms Valérie PILLER CARRARD, from Switzerland, talked about the need, and this is a constant theme and relevant for a comprehensive legal framework, and for sex education, which the report identifies.

Mr Francesco VERDUCCI, socialist, from Italy, talked about the effect on neurological development of all of this and the need for a code of conduct for firms.

These are repeating themes that are embodied in the report, but they're nonetheless relevant. I really appreciate you identifying them today.

Mr Georgios STAMATIS, from the Group of the European People's Party, identified the role of parents as critical, and of course that includes caregivers. Tragically, not all children have their parents caring for them.

Ms Minna REIJONEN, from the European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance, and Finland, said there should be no mobile phones in school. I in fact agree with this. We're working on that in Ireland. While it's not totally germane to the report, it is really relevant and very important.

Ms Franziska HOOP, from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, and Liechtenstein, talked about the companies being held to account. That's so critical.

Ms Gwen BONIFACE, from Canada, identified the numbers and stressed age verification, so crucial.

Mr Yuriy KAMELCHUK, from Ukraine, again, age verification and deep fakes.

Ms Pelin YILIK, from Türkiye, said that there should be no material available to under the age of 18, no matter what the age of consent, and I couldn't agree more.

Again, Ms Nicole HÖCHST, from Germany, identified fake news.

Mr Mehmet AKALIN, from Türkiye, long-term damage and the need for proper algorithms to identify wrong material.

Ms Gabriela BENAVIDES COBOS, from Mexico, all branches of government need to be involved and national laws need to be strong. I stressed that in my own introduction.

Ms Iryna KONSTANKEVYCH, from Ukraine again, that the internet is being used as a tool of war. How wrong! I've virtually almost finished with them. I'll just go...

Cyberbullying, identified by Ms Olena MOSHENETS, as important as the children are being introduced to suicide, which is a horror.

Again, domestic legislation stressed by the next speaker from Ukraine as critical.

Again, academic, physical and psychological health, stressed by the next Ukrainian speaker.

Mr Roberto Juan MOYA CLEMENTE, from Mexico, cited so many reports, 32 million reports of sexual abuse in one year, which is just a horror.

Again, another, Mr Oleksandr KOVALCHUK reasonably raised the ongoing war in Ukraine, and I addressed that earlier.

Mr Brian FRANCIS, the indigenous people in Canada. Shocking suffering there, and no country was immune from that dark type of institution. So, I agree with that.

Can I give heartfelt thanks to people for staying on a Friday, for speaking in such numbers, and such representative people from every delegation and every party.

I'm grateful for that, and I think it was a good debate. I hope we will achieve the passing of the report and consequent actions.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you. Thank you, Mr Joseph O'REILLY.

I will call now Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ as the representative of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development to take the floor.

Dear Pierre-Alain, you have 3 minutes.

Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ (Switzerland, SOC, Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development): Thank you, Mister Chairman.

Violence against children is a recurring problem in our societies, and there are three main reasons why this report is relevant.

The first is the growing dangers posed by the Internet. Children are increasingly exposed to online violence, sometimes from an early age. Increased use of the internet and digital tools, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic and confinements, has resulted in children being overexposed to age-inappropriate content and behavior. Smartphones have undoubtedly become a new vector for the development of their online lives, with all the more risk of being confronted with violence.

The second reason is the existence of new forms of online violence, such as the "deepfake porn" phenomenon.

Finally, the repercussions on children are considerable, particularly of a psychological nature: children who have to deal with disturbing emotions on their own, in their own privacy.

I'd like to thank the rapporteur for his in-depth description and analysis of the problems associated with children's exposure to screens, and hence to violence. The rapporteur has clearly explained the difficulties of striking a balance between the protection of children and other competing rights.

The Assembly must remember that the best interests of the child must prevail in the development and implementation of any measure or policy.

The report proposes the establishment of a comprehensive legal framework. Three measures seem unavoidable: measures to restrict the premature exposure of children to the digital environment, especially the youngest children; mandatory age verification systems on websites providing products and content not intended for children; and lastly, the prohibition of sexual or pornographic "deepfakes", video or audio recordings made or modified with the help of artificial intelligence. This is a problem that falls within the remit of the Lanzarote Committee.

In conclusion, I hope that this report will strengthen the protection of children, a priority for our Assembly.

I would like to thank our rapporteur for his thorough work and the colleagues who took part in this morning's debate. Thank you in advance for your support in the vote.

Vote: The protection of children against online violence

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ.

The Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development has presented a draft resolution, "The protection of children against online violence" (Document 15954), to which six amendments have been tabled, and a draft recommendation (Document 15954) to which no amendments have been tabled.

The amendments to the draft resolution will be taken in the order in which they appear in the Compendium. I remind you that speeches on amendments are limited to 30 seconds.

I understand that the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development wishes to propose to the Assembly that amendments 2, 3, and 4 to the draft resolution, which were unanimously approved by the committee, should be declared as agreed by the Assembly.

Is that so Mr FRIDEZ?

Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ (Switzerland, SOC, Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development): Yes, this is the case.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Does anyone object?

No.

As there is no objection, I declare that amendments 2, 3 and 4 to the draft resolution have been agreed.

I call Mr Ion GROZA to support Amendment 1. You have 30 seconds.

Is there anybody else who would like to support Amendment 1?

What is the position of the Committee?

OK. Yes, please.

Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Dear colleagues,

I want to present this amendment.

I think it's totally in the spirit of this report, and I want to you to support it because in the previous Amendments 2, 3, and 4 we just have this concrete object that we now have at this amendment in order to be approved.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV.

Does anyone wish to speak against the Amendment?

Yes, please.

Mr Norbert KLEINWÄCHTER (Germany, EC/DA): Thank you, Mister President.

This Paragraph 4 is about illegal framework that the main member states are urged to apply. So actually civil society, organisations, and families' organisations do not really have a place in this report and therefore we should reject this amendment.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

What is the opinion of the Committee on the Amendment?

Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ (Switzerland, SOC, Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development): A majority of the Committee was in favour.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): I shall now put the Amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the results to be displayed.

The Amendment is accepted.

I call now Mr Ion GROZA to support Amendment 5. Is Mr Ion GROZA in the room?

Who else would like to support Amendment 5?

What is the opinion of the Committee, Mister Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ?

Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ (Switzerland, SOC): The Committee has proposed a sub-amendment which I can present to you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): *Just a moment [in French].*

Just a moment, Mister Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ, because if nobody supports the Amendment, it will fall.

So, is there...?

Yes please, Mister Serhii SOBOLIEV.

Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Thank you, Mister President.

I think it is very important to have this Amendment. I know that in the Committee it was discussed, and we will have some amendment. I think it is very important to have this Amendment in this text.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Is there anyone to speak against?

Yes, please.

Mr Norbert KLEINWÄCHTER (Germany, EC/DA): Mister President.

If you read the text of the Amendment, it says "to raise awareness about the fight against the oversexualisation of children". So actually this wants to problematise those who criticise the children are oversexualised all the time by certain organisations and in certain schools and in certain kindergartens where, you know, they are asked to do sexual practices that are simply disgusting. So we do not have to raise awareness about the fight against oversexualisation, we have to raise awareness about the fact that oversexualisation happens all the time.

So this Amendment would actually completely inverse what this report wants to say and we absolutely need to reject it.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you, Mister KLEINWÄCHTER.

I call now Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ to support the sub-Amendment.

Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ (Switzerland, SOC, Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development): So, in effect, the Committee is proposing to keep the sentence, but not to put it at the beginning of the paragraph, but at the end.

The Committee has in fact approved this possibility as a subamendment.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Okay, the Committee is in favour. So I will put it now to the vote.

Oh.. but we have already Mr Norbert KLEINWÄCHTER. OK. Does anyone wish to speak against the sub-Amendment, not the Amendment only?

No. So we will proceed to the vote.

Let's put them sub-Amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

The sub-Amendment is accepted.

Now we return to the main Amendment 5 [as amended].

Does anyone wish to speak against the Amendment 5 [as amended]?

What is the opinion of the Committee?

Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ (Switzerland, SOC, Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development): Understood. In favour.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): I shall now put the Amendment as amended to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

The Amendment is accepted.

I call again Mr Ion GROZA if he is in the room to support Amendment 6, or Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV.

Mr Serhii SOBOLIEV (Ukraine, EPP/CD): Dear colleagues,

I want you to support this Amendment because the link between these two definitions is very important and it is the soul of this report.

Thank you.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): Thank you.

Anyone wish to speak against the Amendment?

No.

What is the opinion of the Committee?

Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ (Switzerland, SOC, Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development): The Committee was unanimously against.

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD, President of the Assembly): I shall now put the Amendment to the vote.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

Amendment 6 is rejected.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft Resolution contained in Document 15954 [as amended]. A simple majority is required.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

The draft Resolution is adopted unanimously.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft Recommendation contained in Doc. 15954. I remind you that a two-thirds majority is required.

The vote is open.

The vote is closed.

I call for the result to be displayed.

The draft Recommendation is adopted unanimously.

Dear colleagues,

The next item on today's agenda is the continuation of the debate on the Progress Report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee (Document 15959, Addendum 3).

At its meeting this morning the Bureau has proposed several references to Committees. They are set out in Document 15959, Addendum 3.

These references must be submitted for ratification by the Assembly in accordance with Rule 26.3.

Are there any objections to these references?

No objections. The references are approved.

I now propose that the other decisions in the Progress Report (Document 15959, Addendum 3) be ratified. Are there any objections?

There are no objections, the Progress Report is approved.

We have now come to the end of our business.

I would like to thank all members of the Assembly, particularly rapporteurs of Committees, for their hard work during this Part-Session.

I would like to thank the Vice-Presidents who chaired during this part-session:

- Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ
- Ms Elisabetta GARDINI
- Ms Olena KHOMENKO
- Mr David MORRIS
- Mr Marco NICOLINI
- Ms Agnieszka POMASKA

I would also like to thank the staff and interpreters, both permanent and temporary, who have worked hard to make the Part-Session a success.

The third part of the 2024 Session will be held from 24 to 28 June 2024 and it will be held in our chamber. So this is the last time that we are in the European Parliament's chamber. And so you have a chance for a selfie if you want now, unless you are running for elections in the European Parliament in June.

Dear colleagues,

Before leaving, I would remind you to place your voting cards in the ballot box provided for this purpose at the end of the Chamber.

And now I declare the second part of the 2024 Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe closed.

The sitting is closed.

Debate: Progress report (continued)

The sitting is closed at 12:20.