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Violent pornography: a test for human rights

Committee Opinion¹

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Rapporteur: Mr Joseph O'REILLY, Ireland, Group of the European People's Party

A. Conclusions of the committee

The Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development welcomes the proposals made by the rapporteur, Ms Laura Castel (Spain, UEL), for the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, and proposes some amendments to the draft resolution and recommendation, mainly with a view to clarifying certain aspects relating to children's human rights and the best interest of the child.

B. Proposed amendments

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 3, replace the words “also thanks to” with the following words:

“in large part due to”

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 3, insert the following sentence:

“Any content depicting the sexual exploitation or abuse of children should be referred to as child sexual abuse material and in no circumstance considered legal or permissible”

Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 4, insert the following sentence:

“Children must be protected from exposure to any form of pornography”

Amendment D (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 5, insert the following words:

“and knowing that minors cannot legally consent in accordance with Article 20 of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (ETS No. 201), “the Lanzarote Convention”) and its explanatory report”

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 15972](#), Reference 4809 of 19 April 2024. Reporting committee: Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination. See [Doc. 16422](#). Opinion approved by the committee on 23 June 2026.



Amendment E (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 15, insert the following paragraph:

“The Assembly welcomes the fact that a recommendation on an age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education is currently being drawn up and looks forward to its swift adoption by the Committee of Ministers.”

Amendment F (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 16.1.1., insert the following paragraph:

“fully implement provisions to criminalise and combat child sexual abuse material”

Amendment G (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 16.2.2., insert the following paragraph:

“require online platforms and internet service providers to develop safe technologies and enhance technical detection and response tools to facilitate the prevention, detection, removal, investigation and prosecution of offences involving AI-generated or altered child sexual exploitation or sexual abuse material”

Amendment H (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 16.2.3., after the words “violent, illegal or non-consensual pornographic content”, insert the following words:

“and child sexual abuse material”

Amendment I (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 16.3.2., replace the words “women and girls” with the following words:

“women and children”

Amendment J (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 16.3.4., insert the following words:

“as well as campaigns addressing the dangers posed by children’s exposure to all forms of pornography”.

Amendment K (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 16.3.5., insert the following words:

“and actively promote the Day for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (18 November), such as the 2026 edition of the Day highlighting ethical media reporting on sexual violence against children”

Amendment L (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 16.5.1., insert the following paragraph:

“ensure that producers of pornographic content carry out effective age verification to ensure that any performers involved in production processes are over eighteen”

Amendment M (to the draft recommendation)

In paragraph 3, first sentence, replace the words “violent pornography” with the following words:

“violent pornographic material”

Amendment N (to the draft recommendation)

After paragraph 4, insert the following paragraph:

“The Assembly urges the Committee of Ministers to adopt without delay a recommendation on comprehensive, mandatory, age-appropriate, medically accurate and evidence-based sexuality education, drafted in line with the indications provided in several texts adopted by the Assembly. This education should cover topics such as gender equality, consent, bodily autonomy, respectful personal relationships, emotional education and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence.”

C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Joseph O'Reilly, rapporteur for opinion²

1. Introduction

1. I welcome the report prepared by Ms Laura Castel (Spain, UEL) ([Doc. 16422](#)) and her strong commitment to the preparation of the report. I particularly appreciated discussing with her the focus in this report on “violent pornography” and her reasons for this choice. My personal view is that all pornography may be inherently violent and harmful, especially since the trend today seems to be towards increasingly aggressive portrayals of sexual acts, with increased availability of such material online and aimed not only at adults, but also at young people and children. In my view, the core issue is the legal approach to consent, as clearly stated in the Istanbul Convention, and the harmful effects of pornography in general, including addiction, distorted reality of sexual and emotional relationships, and the glamourisation of violent sexual behaviour. This distinction is more significant in terms of criminal classification and the scale of penalties. I fully agree with Ms Maree Crabbe who stated during the hearing³ on 8 April 2025 that “aggression and violence [are] so common in mainstream pornography that efforts to distinguish “violent pornography” from “pornography” [are] of questionable utility.”

2. I nevertheless share Ms Castel's conclusions that strong focus must be given today to protecting the population, including children, from the forms of pornography which portray violence and where there is no consent either in the depiction of the acts nor in the making of the material.

3. In this opinion, I would like to add a focus on the specific protection of children from pornography in general and I would like to thank the rapporteur for her trust in doing so.

2. Definitions: pornography and child sexual abuse material

4. I think that words matter, particularly on the sensitive issue of violence against children. The definition of pornography understood “as sexually explicit material designed to arouse the viewer” in the draft resolution, seems very vague as based on subjective elements of intentionality and “sexual arousal”. I propose to refer to the definition given by the expert Ms Crabbe. Although referring to “sexual arousal” during the hearing on 8 April 2025,⁴ she defined in an objective manner the notion in her Guidance Note on “Safeguarding Children from the risks of accessing online pornographic content”⁵ commissioned by the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), as follows: “pornography” or “pornographic content” is defined as “referring to any material depicting a person engaged in sexually explicit conduct, whether real and/or simulated, which typically includes portrayals of nudity and/or various sexual acts”. I agree with this definition which corresponds to more tangible elements than “sexual arousal”. It is also important to clarify that illegal content such as child sexual exploitation or sexual abuse material is not included in both definitions.

5. Amendments B, C and D propose to include this clarification in the draft resolution.

6. I also propose to include in the draft resolution the concept of “child sexual abuse material” (acronym: CSAM) to highlight the specific problem of children victims of what is usually called “child pornography”. The definition of “child sexual abuse material” refers to the material criminalised under Article 20 of the Lanzarote Convention but uses the term “child sexual abuse material” instead of “child pornography”, reflecting growing

2. The explanatory memorandum is drawn up under the responsibility of the rapporteur.

3. [Minutes of the joint hearing](#) (Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development and Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination) held in Strasbourg on 8 April 2025 on “Violent pornography”.

4. [Minutes of the joint hearing](#) held in Strasbourg on 8 April 2025.

5. [Thematic Guidance Note on “Safeguarding Children from the risks of accessing online pornographic content”](#), May 2025.

awareness of the inappropriateness of using the latter term to describe material where children have been and/or are being exploited. CSAM also includes material generated or manipulated using artificial intelligence (AI) technology and material where adults are depicted as children engaging in real or simulated sexually explicit conduct. This is in line with recommendations on the appropriate use of terminology from the Lanzarote Committee.⁶

7. This also reflects the Second Edition of the Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse⁷ (“Luxembourg Guidelines”, 2025) which were developed by a global Interagency Working Group including over 40 organisations worldwide to provide updated, survivor-centred and precise language to describe sexual exploitation and abuse of children – helping professionals, policymakers and the media to use words that protect rather than harm. These guidelines clarify definitions, reflect technological and legal developments, and promote respectful, inclusive and consistent language that strengthens child protection responses and supports survivors. I think that outdated and inaccurate terms like “child prostitute” or “child pornography” shift blame onto children whilst distorting public understanding, and should thus be avoided.

8. The purpose of amendments H and J is to include this reference in the draft resolution.

9. In this sense, I fully support the theme chosen by the Lanzarote Committee for the 2026 Edition of the Day for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (18 November):⁸ “Ethical media reporting on sexual violence against children”. I recall that the Day was created in 2015 by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers at the initiative of the Assembly.⁹ In 2022, the United Nations recognised 18 November as the World Day for the Prevention of and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence.¹⁰ Since then, 18 November has been marked globally as #EndChildSexualAbuseDay. I strongly encourage Council of Europe member States to mark this Day, including by using tools and resources for authorities and parliaments,¹¹ to underline the crucial role of the media in protecting children and promoting public awareness.

10. Amendment K reflects this request to the member States.

3. The necessity to safeguard children from pornography

11. As explained by Ms Crabbe in her Guidance Note,¹² children’s exposure to online pornographic content is increasing rapidly. The development of digital and online technologies has had enormous impacts on their exposure: online pornographic content can be easily, freely and anonymously accessed through highly compact and mobile technology commonly used by children. The most common context for seeing pornography is alone and at home. Against this context, pornography is harming children. Research¹³ shows that pornography is not appropriate for children, as I already mentioned in my report on “The protection of children against online violence”¹⁴ and as is highlighted in Ms Castel’s report.

12. To sum up, most children are exposed to online pornographic content, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Pornography has become a key source of information and education about sexuality for many children. Children’s experiences of pornography tend to be highly gendered. Boys are more likely than girls to view pornography and to perceive it positively. Many adolescent males view pornography frequently. Girls and younger children are more likely than boys and older children to feel upset by pornography. Children’s exposure to pornography is associated with a range of harms, including an increase in violence supportive attitudes and harmful sexual behaviours, mostly against women and girls. The current situation – in which graphic and often violent and degrading pornographic content is freely, widely and easily accessible with little to no regulation to prevent exposure to children – is not safe for children.¹⁵

6. See Lanzarote Committee [Implementation report](#), 10 March 2022.

7. Second edition of the terminology guidelines (ECPAT – [Terminology Guidelines Second Edition](#)).

8. [2026 Edition – Day for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#).

9. [18 November: Day for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#).

10. United Nations – [World Day for the Prevention of and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence](#).

11. [Tools and resources for authorities and parliaments](#) – Children’s rights Division of the Council of Europe.

12. Thematic Guidance Note on “Safeguarding Children from the risks of accessing online pornographic content”, May 2025.

13. For example, ‘A lot of it is actually just abuse’- Young people and pornography – Children’s Commissioner for England, 31 January 2023.

14. [Report “The protection of children against online violence”](#) (Rapporteur: Mr Joseph O’Reilly, Ireland, EPP/CD).

15. Thematic Guidance Note on “Safeguarding Children from the risks of accessing online pornographic content”, May 2025, page 13.

13. Amendments A, F and G reflect this necessity to protect children from pornographic content.

14. A draft recommendation on the protection of children against violence through age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education has been prepared by the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) and will soon be submitted to the Committee of Ministers for adoption. I commend this initiative and urge the Committee of Ministers to adopt it quickly and ensure the highest standards for comprehensive, mandatory, age-appropriate, medically accurate and evidence-based sexuality education. This education should include information on gender equality, consent, bodily autonomy, respectful personal relationships, emotional education and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence. In addition, referring to the report “Sexual violence against men and boys”,¹⁶ I would like to stress that children, both girls and boys, could be subject to objectification, in particular when “used” for sexual purpose (and hence Amendment I).

15. Amendment E highlights the importance of the Council of Europe’s work on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education. Amendment N reflects the call on the Committee of Ministers.

16. Finally, as a means of prevention in the pornographic industry, I stress the necessity for producers of pornographic content to carry out effective age verification to ensure that any performers involved in production processes are over eighteen, as proposed in amendment L.

4. Conclusion

17. Although I hope that in the future all forms of pornography will be considered to be violent and dangerous enough to be prohibited, I can only support Ms Castel’s report and encourage the members of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development and the Assembly to do the same. This is a crucial health issue for children and the society as a whole. The amendments I propose are inspired by a desire to complement and strengthen the text.

16. [Report “Sexual violence against men and boys”](#) (Rapporteur, Mr Edmunds Cepurītis, Latvia, SOC).