

German speaking child sexual abuse material users on the Dark Web

A Communication from Suojellaan Lapsia, Protect Children ry. concerning the findings from German responses to the ReDirection “Help us to Help You” Dark Web survey on individuals who search for and view child sexual abuse material on the internet.

Suojellaan Lapsia, Protect Children ry.



Suojellaan Lapsia
Protect Children

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Suojellaan Lapsia, Protect Children ry. is a non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation based in Helsinki, Finland. The purpose of the work of Suojellaan Lapsia, Protect Children ry. is to end all forms of sexual violence against children. For more information about our work and inquiries, please visit our website: www.suojellaanlapsia.fi/en

“German speaking child sexual abuse material users on the Dark Web” Suojellaan Lapsia, Protect Children ry.

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Executive Summary

This Communication outlines findings from Protect Children’s Dark Web ReDirection research on individuals who search for and view child sexual abuse material. This Communication considers the results arising from the German language responses to the “*Help us to Help You*” survey. A total of 1079 German language responses have thus far been gathered to the two surveys, making it the language with the 4th most responses, after English, Spanish, and Russian.

49% of German speaking respondents have sought direct contact with a child after viewing child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

One of the most significant findings of this Communication is the high correlation between viewing CSAM and seeking direct contact with a child online among German speaking respondents. 49% (N=240) of German speaking respondents have at least sometimes sought direct contact with a child, this is 11% more than the average across respondents in all languages. The difference is startling and speaks to the urgency of the topic. Legislation must obligate online service providers to proactively scan for and remove CSAM from their platforms to prevent further crimes of sexual violence from occurring against children. Furthermore, service providers need to be obliged to scan for and detect grooming on their platforms to better protect children from sexual violence.

70% of German speaking respondents first saw child sexual abuse material (CSAM) under the age of 18.

An overwhelming majority of respondents were children themselves when first seeing child sexual abuse material. What is more, 51% report first seeing the material accidentally, clearly signaling the sheer ease of gaining access to CSAM on the internet. When describing where they first saw CSAM, a number of open-ended responses detail having come across the material on social media channels (e.g., Facebook & YouTube), moreover, many responses detail how the individuals were first exposed to the material after being sent it on a messaging application.¹ Furthermore, some respondents state easy access to CSAM via surface web search engines and interpersonal communications on encrypted applications including WhatsApp.

It is of immense importance to understand the connection between viewing child sexual abuse material and committing further acts of sexual violence against children. Whilst CSAM viewers and offenders seeking direct contact with children may have been thought to be two different groups of individuals, research demonstrates that this is not, in fact the case. Research demonstrates a clear correlation between viewing CSAM and seeking direct contact with children online. As the existence and availability of CSAM leads to further crimes of sexual violence against children, the urgency and importance of *detecting* and *removing* CSAM from the internet is palpable.

“The European Union has become the epicenter of the problem, hosting the majority of CSAM worldwide. It is, therefore, more important than ever for the Union and its Member States to amalgamate and award children the protection they are entitled to by enacting new, sustainable legislation.”

Anna Katariina Ovaska, LL.M.
Deputy Director, Legal Specialist, Protect Children

Background

Suojellaan Lapsia, Protect Children ry. is a Helsinki-based non-governmental, not-for-profit organization focused solely on the prevention of all forms of sexual violence against children.² Protect Children broaches the topic from various angles, resulting in a holistic approach to the prevention of sexual violence against children. Protect Children's work is based strongly in research, which we believe makes the basis of effective and sustainable child protection work.

The ReDirection project is an ongoing project led by Protect Children using innovative research methods to gather unprecedented information about anonymous offenders and potential offenders who search for child sexual abuse material (CSAM) online.³ Information has been gathered through two surveys, titled “*Help us to Help You*” and “*No Need for Help*”. The surveys are available in 21 languages. Since December 2020, Protect Children has been conducting research in the Dark Web on online child sexual abuse material (CSAM) offenders. Over 22,500 individuals searching for CSAM on the dark web have responded anonymously to surveys detailing their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to their search for and use of CSAM.

With the new knowledge collected, Protect Children developed the ReDirection Self-Help Program: a low threshold, confidential, online self-help intervention resource for individuals who are motivated to stop using CSAM. Protect Children adopts a primary prevention approach, in the sense that we aim to intervene to prevent harm before it occurs. It is essential to tackle the prevention of sexual violence against children from all angles, in order to truly protect children.

Sexual violence against children online

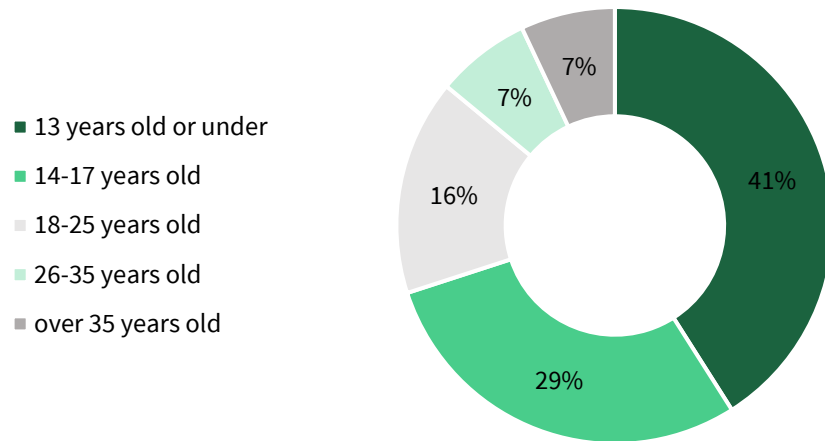
It is important to note, that whilst the innovative ReDirection research is conducted on the Dark Web, CSAM exists everywhere on the internet as is in no way limited to the Dark Web. On the contrary, it must be borne in mind that perpetrators often procure CSAM from child victims on the surface web, as perpetrators go to where the children are.⁴ This procuring can be done on for example social media platforms and can be conducted in a number of ways, including but not limited to, through grooming, extorting, manipulating, or deceiving a child.⁵

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) reports a global total of 31,802,525 individual reports of suspected child sexual abuse by electronic service providers alone in 2022.⁶ These nearly 32 million reports consisted of a total of over 88 million files of images, videos, and other files of depicting sexual violence against children. Of these files, over 5,2 million files were within reports concerning the European Union. As all reports concern the surface web it is evident that CSAM is being *widely* distributed on the surface web. In NCMEC's statistics concerning reports from the European Union, messaging services and social media platforms were the top two environments where CSAM was detected.⁷

As reported by the Internet Watch Foundation, Germany is one of the biggest hosts of CSAM in the European Union.⁸ Dramatic escalation in the amount of CSAM hosted in Germany is unmistakable: between 2020 and 2022 the amount became nearly 10 times larger.⁹

German speaking respondents saw CSAM at a younger age

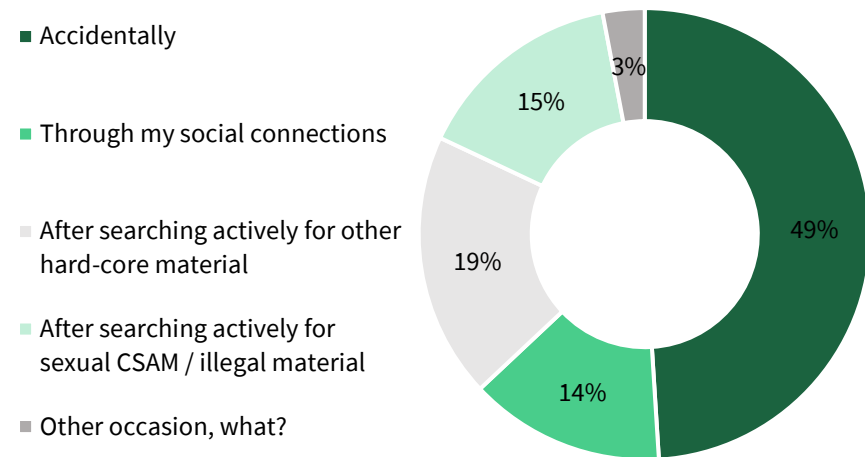
Q1 When I first saw CSAM/illegal violent material I was
N=735



German speaking respondents reported first seeing CSAM at an alarmingly young age. 70% (N=513) were under 18 years of age, of which 41% (N=304) were 13 or younger. Interestingly, the corresponding percentages in all language responses are 65% and 37% respectively.¹⁰ Better regulation is needed to ensure that children are not subjected to CSAM or other violent material on the internet. Stronger age verification and safeguards must be put into place by internet service providers and CSAM must be efficiently and proactively removed from the internet.

Half of respondents first saw CSAM accidentally

Q2 When I first saw CSAM/illegal violent material, it was
N=597



The availability of CSAM on the internet is demonstrated by the sheer number of respondents reporting having first come across CSAM accidentally. What is more, the majority of respondents were children themselves when first encountering the material. With the knowledge regarding the connection between viewing CSAM and seeking direct contact with children online, it is vital that CSAM be effectively and efficiently removed from the internet.¹¹

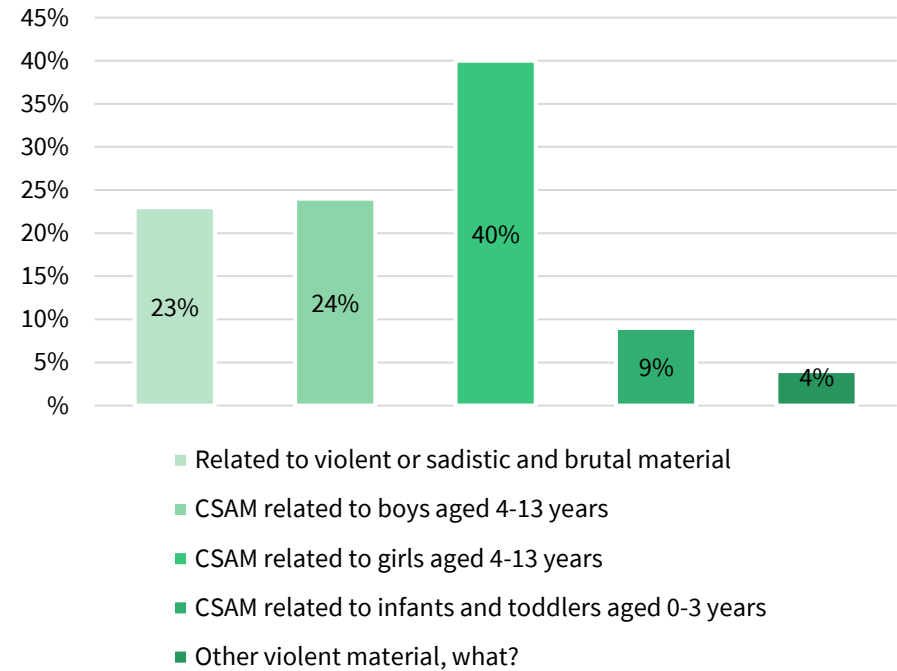
Type of CSAM viewed by respondents

Child sexual abuse material, or CSAM, (often referred to as ‘child pornography’ in legislation) includes images, videos, livestreams, and any other material that depicts sexual violence against a child.¹² CSAM can include material that shows a child, as young as a newborn, in a sexually suggestive or explicit manner partially clothed, or nude, being subjected to rape and other violence, and can include material that does or does not illustrate sexual activity or violence at all.

The images are not just images – real harm is inflicted onto real children when the material is produced. Viewing, using, and distributing the images contribute to the demand and thus the creation of new material and often leads to further offences being committed by the viewer.¹³

*“For the victims of CSAM, the mere awareness that there is a video recording or photograph of their sexual abuse, coupled with the fear of its possible spread and eternal circulation online can have a life-long devastating impact. When CSAM is distributed online, the children are re-victimized each time the material is viewed”.*¹⁴

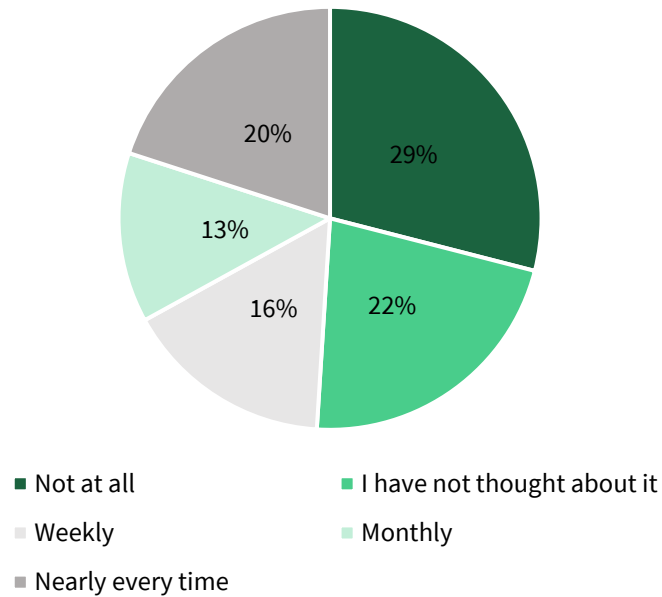
Q5 I use images and videos
N= 535



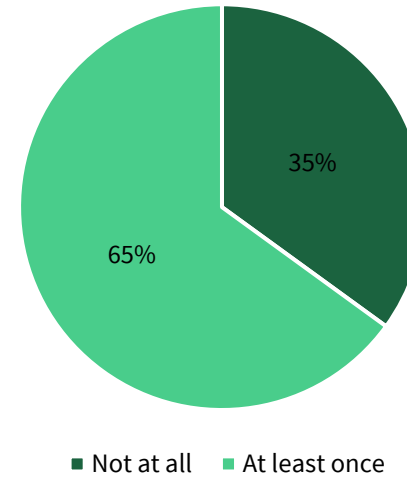
German speaking respondents report viewing CSAM depicting girls nearly twice as much as material depicting boys. However, a quarter of the German speaking respondents report viewing CSAM depicting prepubescent boys, which is a significant increase to the average across language respondents which stands at 18%.¹⁵

Many respondents want to change their behavior

Q7 I would like to stop searching and viewing CSAM/illegal violent material
N=516



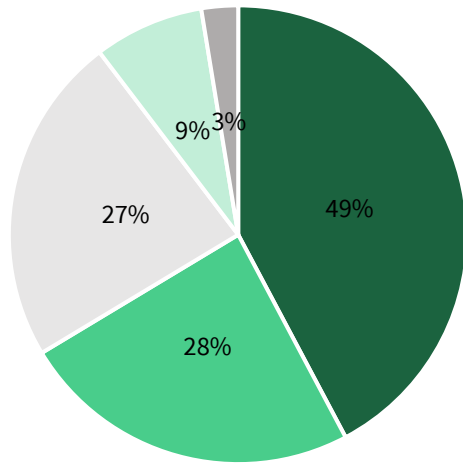
Q8 I have tried to stop searching and viewing CSAM/illegal violent material
N=499



Both European Union and Council of Europe law mandate States Parties to offer intervention measures for people who fear that they might (re-)offend against a child.¹⁶ Nearly half (N=253) of the German speaking respondents would actively want to stop viewing CSAM, whilst 65% (N=327) have tried to stop. Sexual violence against children must be prevented before any harm materializes. Therefore, low threshold, anonymous resources must be made available for individuals who fear that they will (re-)offend against a child.

Developments in technology lead to changes in perpetrators' *modi operandi*

Q11 I watch livestreamed CSAM
N=442



- No
- Yes, livestreaming of boys aged 4-13 years
- Yes, livestreaming of girls aged 4-13 years
- Yes, livestreaming of infants and toddlers aged 0-3 years
- Yes, livestreaming of other violent material, what?

With the constant development of technology come the changes in the ways in which crimes are committed against children. The internet allows for one perpetrator to simultaneously commit crimes against tens or hundreds of

children, or to share and distribute thousands of images depicting sexual violence against children, all with a few clicks on an electronic device. One of these developments in the *modi operandi* is the viewing of livestreamed, or real-time, sexual violence against a child. Of the German speaking sample, more than half of the respondents (N=255) reported viewing livestreamed CSAM.

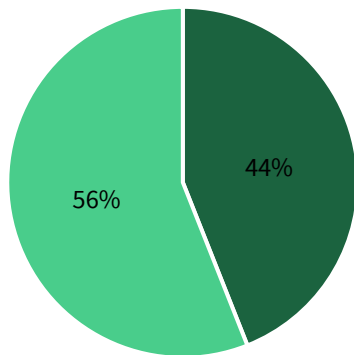
Livestreamed CSAM can depict a child committing sexual violence against themselves or another child with the guidance of a perpetrator who themselves is located elsewhere, or sexual violence committed against a child by the perpetrator who is in the same physical location as the child victim.

“With the technological developments come changes in the modi operandi of perpetrators, and current legislation is no longer effective in the prevention of sexual violence against children online today.”

*Anna Katariina Ovaska, LL.M.
Deputy Director, Legal Specialist, Protect Children*

German speaking respondents more likely to seek direct contact with children

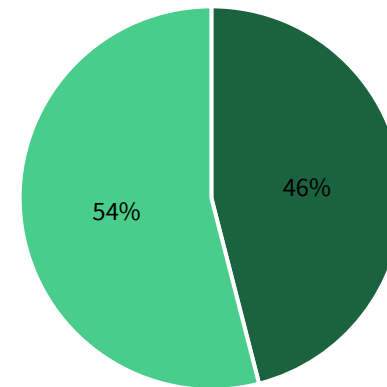
Q17 I feel afraid that viewing CSAM/illegal violent material might lead to sexual acts against a child or another human
N=484



- Not at all
- At least sometimes (incl. rarely, monthly, weekly, & nearly every time)

Notably, 56% (N=272) of respondents at least sometimes fear that their use of CSAM will lead to further sexual acts against a child. This number is 4% higher than the overall average across all language versions.

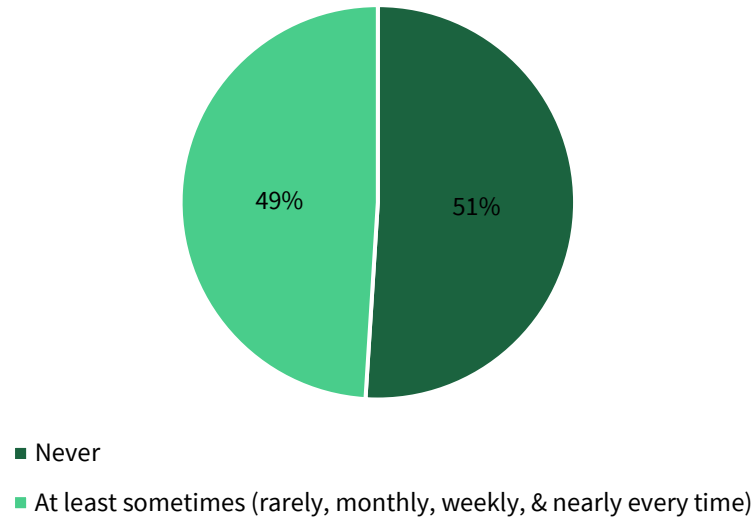
Q18 How often has viewing CSAM/illegal violent material made you think about seeking direct contact with children through online platforms (chat or other)?
N=487



- Never
- At least sometimes (incl. rarely, monthly, weekly, & nearly every time)

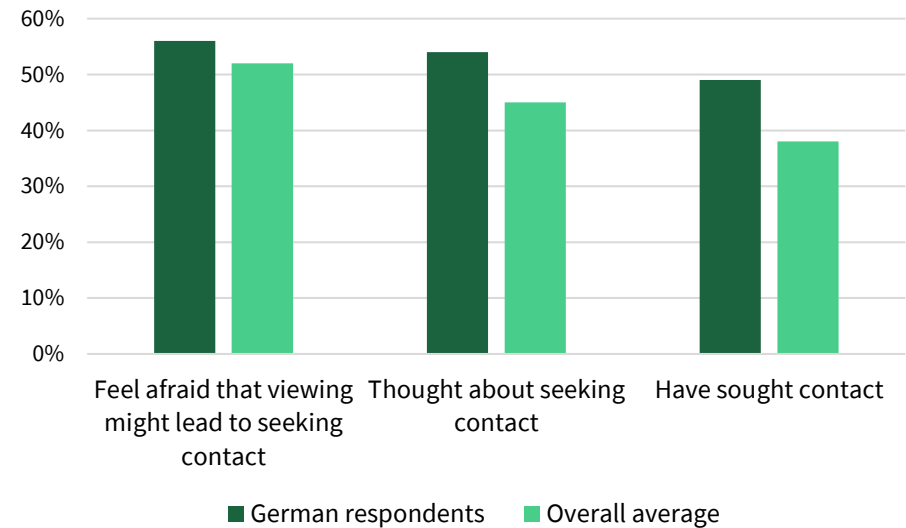
54% (N=262) of German speaking respondents reported that they have at least sometimes thought about seeking direct contact with a child online after viewing CSAM. That is over half of all German speaking respondents. The corresponding average across all language versions is 45%.

Q19 How often after viewing CSAM/illegal violent material have you sought direct contact with children through online platforms (chat or other)? N=485



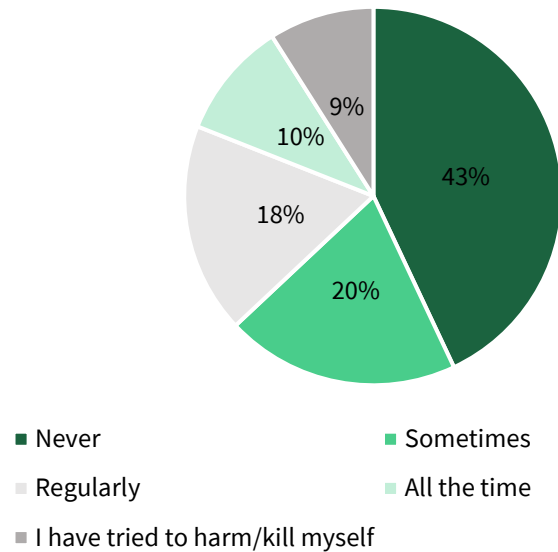
One of the perhaps most significant findings of this paper is the high correlation between viewing CSAM and seeking direct contact with a child online. 49% (N=240) of German speaking respondents have at least sometimes sought direct contact with a child. That is a staggering 11% difference to the overall average. With this clear correlation between viewing the material and seeking contact with children, online service providers need to be legally obliged to remove CSAM from their platforms to prevent further crimes of sexual violence against children from occurring. Moreover, service providers must be obligated to scan for and detect grooming on their platforms to prevent children from falling victim to further forms of sexual violence.

Viewing CSAM and Contacting Children



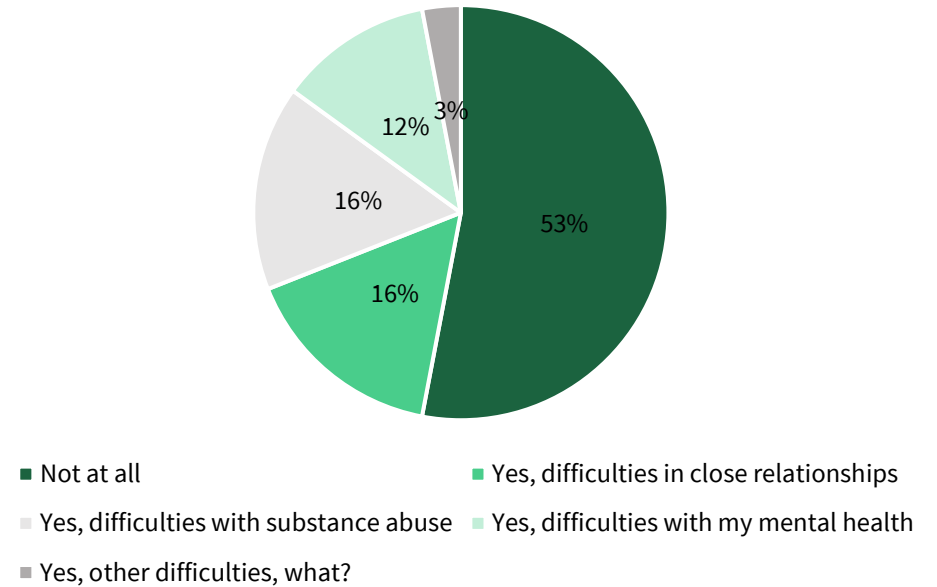
Societal and economic implications of CSAM use

Q20 Have you had any self-harming thoughts or suicide attempts?
N=451



57% (N=257) of the German speaking respondents report having at least sometimes experienced thoughts and/or attempts of self-harm or suicide.

Q22 Have you experienced any difficulties related to your use of CSAM/illegal violent material?
N=433

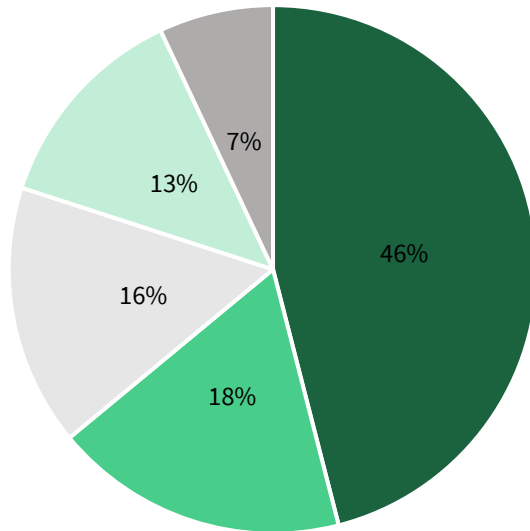


47% (N=204) of German speaking respondents have experienced some difficulties relating to their use of CSAM. These difficulties, for example with substance abuse and mental health, have societal and economic costs that could be reduced if the CSAM use is addressed through adequate prevention measures.

Responses to “Yes, other difficulties, what” (N=16), can be roughly categorized into two groups, namely, mentions of substance abuse in combination with mental health difficulties, and legal consequences.

Q24 Have you experienced difficulties in carrying out your ordinary daily routine and activities?

N=427



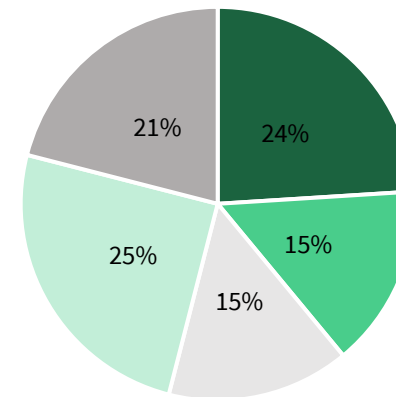
■ Not at all ■ Yes, sometimes ■ Yes, monthly ■ Yes, weekly ■ Yes, daily

Over half of the German speaking respondents (54%, N=229) report experiencing difficulties in carrying out daily routines and activities. Such difficulties may have economic effects as they may influence the ability of the individuals to work and contribute to the economy.

Many CSAM users are in communication with each other

Q26 Have you been in contact with other CSAM/illegal violent material users?

N=422



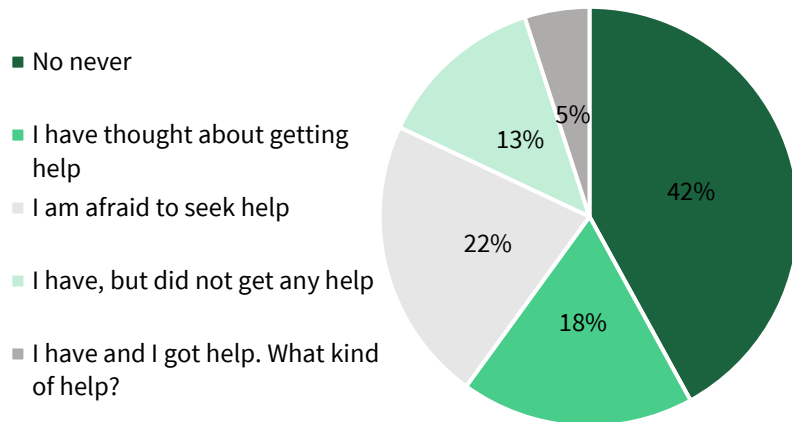
■ Yes, weekly
 ■ Yes, monthly
 ■ Yes, sometimes
 ■ No, never
 ■ I do not want to be in contact with other users

More than half of the German speaking respondents have at least at some point been in contact with other CSAM users. Communication between individuals is common through for example encrypted messaging platforms. Many of the respondents (42%, N=175) reported that they have been affected by the feelings, thoughts, or behavior of other CSAM users to

some extent. 25% (N=106) reported that other CSAM users have had a strong or moderate effect on their own feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. This indicates that communication amongst perpetrators fuels cognitive distortions and reinforces and rationalizes offending behavior.¹⁷

Help-seeking motivations higher amongst German speaking respondents

Q28 Have you sought help to stop searching, using or sharing CSAM/illegal violent material?
N=420



Nearly half of German speaking respondents reported that they would like to stop using CSAM. However, only 18% (N=77) have sought help to stop using CSAM, and only 5% have received help. This demonstrates that whilst there is a strong demand for help resources to help CSAM users to change

their behavior, such resources are either not available, or not being used by the intended group.

Q31 Help us to help you? If you have tried to stop using and sharing CSAM/illegal violent material and got back to using it, could you tell us 3 reasons why you have not succeeded? What would help you to stop using and sharing CSAM/illegal violent material? N=123

Why haven't you succeeded in stopping using CSAM?

Theme	N	Example
Strong interest, addiction	19	"It has become an addiction"
Lack of control	3	"I cannot control my thoughts when sexual arousal is high"
Ease of access	3	"It is too easy to access" "I always know how to bypass blocker apps"
Outlet for negative emotions	3	"It is the most powerful means of gratification needed in the aftermath of stress."
Curiosity	2	"Strong curiosity"
No desire to stop	1	"I don't want to stop"

What would help you to stop using CSAM?

Theme	N	Example
Limiting access	7	“App lock and blocker” “Easier to prevent tor download”
Sexual release through other means	4	“It would help me enormously to release the pent-up sexual desire in a way that would not harm anyone.”
Relationships	3	“Someone who loves me would stop me.” “A fulfilling sex life with a partner my age would help me.”
Professional help, therapy	3	“online anonymous tor chat with experts” “access therapy”
Societal attitudes, stigma	2	“It would help if you could talk openly about your problems in society without being stigmatized.”
Daily life	1	“I went to work 6 days a week”
Awareness of harms to children	1	“It would help if I was constantly aware that these children are probably having the worst experiences of their lives.”

Conclusion

With the findings laid out in this Communication, Protect Children urges all relevant parties to carefully assess the existing legislation and its shortcomings, and to take concrete actions towards promoting more stringent measures, including new EU legislation to effectively protect the rights and well-being of all children. Stronger measures are urgently needed to end all sexual violence against children everywhere.

Internet service providers must be obliged, by law, to detect, report, and remove child sexual abuse material from their platforms. Perpetrators seek direct contact with children after viewing CSAM and most viewers are children themselves when first coming across the material. Material depicting sexual violence against children must be urgently and effectively removed from the internet to prevent further crimes of sexual violence against children. This cannot be achieved without regulation mandating it.

This Communication presents findings of research conducted by Suojellaan Lapsia, Protect Children ry. in the ReDirection project, which is funded by the Safe Online Initiative at End Violence. End Violence’s Safe Online Initiative, in close partnership with grantees and partners, is leading on global efforts to make the internet safe for children by investing for impact in programmes that work and generating evidence to inform advocacy and collective action.

¹ Suojellaan Lapsia, Protect Children ry. (2023). Suojellaan Lapsia, Protect Children ry. "Help us to Help You" survey results – not publicly available.

² See more: www.protectchildren.fi

³ The ReDirection Project is funded by the Safe Online Initiative at End Violence. For more information on Protect Children's ReDirection Project and research and the research methodology, please refer to: <https://www.suojellaanlapsia.fi/en/redirection>, Insoll T., Ovaska A. K. & Vaaranen-Valkonen N., CSAM Users in the Dark Web: Protecting Children Through Prevention (2021) available here: <https://www.suojellaanlapsia.fi/en/post/csam-users-in-the-dark-web-protecting-children-through-prevention>, and Insoll, T., Ovaska, A. K., Nurmi, J., Aaltonen, M., & Vaaranen-Valkonen, N. (2022). Risk Factors for Child Sexual Abuse Material Users Contacting Children Online: Results of an Anonymous Multilingual Survey on the Dark Web. *Journal of Online Trust and Safety*, 1(2).

⁴ Over 70% of actioned reports to the Internet Watch Foundation in 2021 included CSAM that had been "self-generated" by the child victim. "Self-generated" refers to material that has been recorded by the child themselves due to e.g., manipulation, grooming, coercion, or extortion. See more: Internet Watch Foundation (2021) <https://annualreport2021.iwf.org.uk/trends>.

⁵ The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children reported 52% of received notices of incidents of 'Online Enticement' to have occurred within a chat or messaging service, and 48% of incidents occurred on a social media or online gaming platform. See more: National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (February 2023) *2022 Cybertipline Data – Reports Resolving to the European Union* p 4. (Annex I)

⁶ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (February 2023) *2022 Cybertipline Data – Reports Resolving to the European Union* p 1. (Annex I)

⁷ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (February 2023) *2022 Cybertipline Data – Reports Resolving to the European Union* p 2. (Annex I)

⁸ Internet Watch Foundation (2022) available here: <https://www.iwf.org.uk/news-media/news/germany-among-worst-for-hosting-sexual-imagery-of-children-in-the-eu-iwf-warns/>.

⁹ Internet Watch Foundation (2022) available here: <https://www.iwf.org.uk/news-media/news/germany-among-worst-for-hosting-sexual-imagery-of-children-in-the-eu-iwf-warns/>.

¹⁰ Suojellaan Lapsia, Protect Children ry. (2023). Updated ReDirection research results containing findings from all language versions have not yet been published.

¹¹ Insoll, T., Ovaska, A. K., Nurmi, J., Aaltonen, M., & Vaaranen-Valkonen, N. (2022). Risk Factors for Child Sexual Abuse Material Users Contacting Children Online: Results of an Anonymous Multilingual Survey on the Dark Web. *Journal of Online Trust and Safety*, 1(2).

¹² Please note that the legal definition of CSAM varies slightly from State to State even inside the European Union due to existing opt-out clauses in current legislation.

¹³ See findings of the ReDirection "Help us to Help You" survey above, & Insoll, T., Ovaska, A. K., Nurmi, J., Aaltonen, M., & Vaaranen-Valkonen, N. (2022). Risk Factors for Child Sexual Abuse Material Users Contacting Children Online: Results of an Anonymous Multilingual Survey on the Dark Web. *Journal of Online Trust and Safety*, 1(2).

¹⁴ Insoll T., Ovaska A. K. & Vaaranen-Valkonen N., CSAM Users in the Dark Web: Protecting Children Through Prevention (2021) available here: <https://www.suojellaanlapsia.fi/en/post/csam-users-in-the-dark-web-protecting-children-through-prevention> p 8.

¹⁵ Suojellaan Lapsia, Protect Children ry. (2023). Updated ReDirection research results containing findings from all language versions have not yet been published.

¹⁶ Directive 2011/93/EU art. 22 & Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse art. 7.

¹⁷ Huikuri S., Insoll T., Darknet Online Communities of Child Sexual Abusers: Reinforcing and Rationalising Offending Behaviour (2022) <https://www.suojellaanlapsia.fi/en/post/darknet-online-communities-of-child-sexual-abusers>.