

News story: Tackling child sexual exploitation online

Today (Monday 3 September), the Home Secretary set out the scale of online child sexual exploitation (CSE), with a 700% increase in child abuse images being referred to the National Crime Agency (NCA) in the last five years, up to 80,000 people in the UK presenting some kind of sexual threat to children online and material increasingly featuring younger and younger children.

In a speech at the headquarters of the [National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children \(NSPCC\)](#) the Home Secretary vowed to lead the cross-Government effort in the response to the evolving threat of online CSE, including funding for law enforcement, intelligence agencies and a new prevention drive.

He called on the technology industry to work in partnership with each other and with government to stop online child sexual abuse, sharing solutions and best practice to improve the response.

In his [speech](#), Home Secretary Sajid Javid said:

I've been impressed by the progress the likes of Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and Apple have made on counter-terrorism.

Now I want to see the same level of commitment for child sexual exploitation. In recent years there has been some good work in this area. But the reality is that the threat has evolved quicker than industry's response and industry has not kept up. And there are some companies that refuse to take it seriously.

I am not just asking for change, I am demanding it. And the people are demanding it too.

And if web giants do not take more measures to remove this type of content from their platforms, then I won't be afraid to take action.

How far we legislate will be informed by the action and attitude that industry takes.

He said that he expects technology companies to:

- block child sexual abuse material as soon as companies detect it being uploaded
- stop child grooming taking place on their platforms
- work with government and law enforcement to shut down live-streamed child abuse
- for companies to be much more forward leaning in helping law enforcement agencies to deal with these types of crimes
- show a greater level of openness and transparency and a willingness to share best practice and technology between companies

Today, the Home Secretary announced an extra £21.5 million investment in law enforcement over the next 18 months to reduce the volume of offending and pursue the most hardened and dangerous abusers. The majority of this funding will go to UK law enforcement and intelligence agencies to tackle the most tech-savvy and dedicated abusers.

The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse estimates that 15% of girls and 5% of boys experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 16 while NSPCC research shows some children are being groomed online and blackmailed to perform sexual acts in less than 45 minutes from initial contact.

Director General Lynne Owens at the NCA said:

There are a significant number of sophisticated offenders including those involved in grooming, streaming of live abuse and transnational sex offending, who are very dangerous. The NCA and the police prioritise these investigations to prosecute offenders and safeguard vulnerable children. However, investigators are facing a constant uphill struggle because of the significant numbers of offenders committing preventable crimes, such as viewing and sharing images and videos that are easily accessible online.

The technology exists for industry to design-out these offences and to stop this material from being viewed. Some online platforms have taken important steps to improve safety, but we are asking for more. We want industry to invest in preventing these online offences from happening in the first place. It is not just a matter for law enforcement. We need industry to make it harder for anyone to access indecent images on the internet.

A further £2.6 million will be made available for prevention work, including to the child protection charity the [Lucy Faithfull Foundation](#). The charity works to reduce demand for online sexual images of children and prevent offending before it occurs.

Chief Executive of the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, Elaine McConnell said:

For the last 3 years we've been working to deter illegal online

behaviour by highlighting to offenders and potential offenders that viewing or sharing sexual images of children is a crime, that it's incredibly harmful to the children in the images and that the consequences of the behaviour are serious.

Not all offenders want to stop – but we know many do, and we know that with our help they can change their behaviour – the challenge for us is reaching them. We would welcome more collaborative working with tech companies to spread deterrence messages and signpost to our services.

With funding from the Home Office announced today, we will be able to answer more calls through our confidential 'Stop it Now!' helpline to reduce offending, reduce demand for images, and protect more children.

To further support the response the Home Secretary also outlined measures to support law enforcement to track down offenders, build children's resilience, prevent abuse occurring and support victims. These include:

- the Home Secretary will be convening a meeting of industry experts in the US, in partnership with Microsoft to challenge companies to work together to come up with tools to detect online child grooming which will then be offered for free to other companies
- £250,000 being made available to support new ideas on how to detect and disrupt live streaming of abuse
- concerted international co-operation at the next Five Country Ministerial – a major meeting of the Five Eyes security partners – which will be held in London in 2019, focusing on targeting online CSE
- a new international network of Government advisers on serious and organised crime who will be stationed around the world and will help coordinate and drive action to tackle child sexual abuse in different regions
- a working group will be established with business and the advertising industry to look at stopping profit being generated from adverts on child abuse websites

The measures outlined by the Home Secretary builds on the government's substantial investment since 2015 in UK law enforcement capabilities to tackle child sexual exploitation. This includes:

- nearly doubling the number of officers in the National Crime Agency combatting CSE
- investing £600,000 in Project Arachnid – a ground-breaking piece of technology that helps identify and remove Child Sexual Abuse material from the internet. It's already crawled 1.3 billion web pages for suspected child sexual abuse material, analysed 51 billion images and issued more than 800,000 takedown notices

- establishing the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse to thoroughly examine the extent to which institutions in England and Wales have done their job at protecting children
- announcing that relationship education will be made mandatory in primary schools as well as teaching children at every level about staying safe online
- awarding 11 councils £13 million through the Trusted Relationships Fund to protect vulnerable children from exploitation and abuse