



# Child sexual abuse: updated rules to address new technological risks

Press Releases **LIBE** Yesterday

- Limitation periods should be removed to give victims time to speak up
- A definition of consent applicable to children above the age of consent
- Child-friendly justice and support mechanisms

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## **On Tuesday, the Civil Liberties Committee endorsed legislative changes to improve EU countries' capacity to fight child sexual abuse effectively.**

Updating the EU-wide definitions of the crimes linked to child sexual abuse (CSA), the proposal endorsed by MEPs also adapts them to new technologies. The aim is to improve cooperation between national authorities on investigations and prosecutions and on victim support.

### **Higher punishments and no limitation periods**

In their amendments, MEPs propose to raise the maximum punishments for a number of CSA offences, including for sexual activities with children above the age of sexual consent who do not consent. Other examples are recruiting children for exploitation in prostitution, possessing or distributing CSA material, and offering remuneration for certain CSA crimes.

MEPs also want to abolish limitation periods for crimes covered by the updated law, since statistics show that the majority of victims only speak about their experiences a long time after the offence occurred. Victims should also be able to seek compensation indefinitely.

### **New technological crimes**

To bring EU laws up to date with technological developments, MEPs want to criminalise explicitly the use of artificial intelligence systems “designed or adapted primarily” for CSA crimes. They have also endorsed provisions on the livestreaming of CSA, and dissemination online of related material.

To make investigations more effective, MEPs are pushing for the possibility to conduct undercover investigations and employ covert surveillance methods, including “honeypots”.

### **Definition of consent and exemptions for peers**

MEPs want a new definition of consent specifically for children who are above the age of sexual consent. No member state should criminalise consent-based interactions between peers, if it involves no abuse of trust or dependency, they argue. Pretending to be a peer should, however, be a punishable aggravating circumstance.

### **Reporting and victim support**

Child victim support should be free of charge and include medical and forensic examinations, help with documenting evidence, gender-sensitive medical care and access to sexual and reproductive healthcare. MEPs want this to be in line with the [Barnahus model](#), where services come together under one roof to support child victims.

The committee report states that reporting mechanisms should have adequate funding and be user-friendly and gender-sensitive. Third parties, such as civil society organisations, should also be able to report crimes.

### **Quote**

Rapporteur [Jeroen Lenaers](#) (EPP, Netherlands) said: “We need to make sure our laws to fight child sexual abuse are up to date and that we criminalise new phenomena, including so-called “instruction manuals” that

facilitate abuse, livestreamed abuse and deep-fake CSA material. We also want tougher punishments and more mechanisms for reporting abuse. Because it often takes decades for victims to come forward, we need to abolish the limitation periods for these crimes. We owe it to victims to support them properly through the legal process and ensure that justice is done.”

## Next steps

The Civil Liberties Committee adopted the draft position by 57 votes in favour, 0 against, and with 0 abstentions. Parliament will debate and vote on this position in plenary during its 16-19 June session, after which negotiations with Council on the final form of the law can begin.

## Background

The recast directive on sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children, child sexual abuse material and solicitation of children includes measures to harmonise EU countries’ definitions of and punishments for crimes, covering both online and offline activity.

A separate proposal for [a regulation on child sexual abuse material](#) is also being discussed by lawmakers. The European Parliament [adopted its position](#) on the draft regulation in 2023; legislative talks can begin once Council reaches a common position.

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## Further information

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> [Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs](#)

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 [EP compromise amendments \(all adopted\)](#)

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