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Science of Reporting



INHOPE

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INHOPE Focus Group 2021

What if every member of the public knew what to do if they came across Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) or suspected CSAM, the same way they know what to do and who to call if there is a fire? What if every member of the public reported online CSAM because they knew that an urgent response was needed and because they knew what to report and how?

It has been predicted that there will be 6 billion Internet users by 2022 and more than 7.5 billion Internet users by 2030. As this number increases it becomes more vital that the public have information on how to report CSAM at their fingertips. The question, and the topic of INHOPE's 2021 Focus Group, is how to make that 'what if' happen.

With presentations from the European Commission, INHOPE members hotlines, NCMEC, ICMEC, and six interactive break-out sessions, the key topics of discussions and take-aways are provided below.

Part 1: Deep-dive into public reporting

The day opened with an informative and engaging speech from June Lowery-Kingston from the European Commission (EC), who provided an in-depth overview of the EC's strategy to make Europe “fit for the digital age.”

Following this, the first half of the day focussed on public reporting. This began by a presentation from NCMEC, who had conducted intensive research on their reporters to learn more about the content being reported, as well as the needs of the reporters. Their key findings were

- **Most reporters are one-time reporters.** NCMEC conducted intensive research on their reporters to learn more about the content being reported, as well as the needs of the reporters. They found that the public and parents make up the bulk of reporters, followed by child victims themselves who make up a growing number of reporters.
- **An increase in viral images shared across multiple platforms is leading to duplicate reporting.** Viral sharing of these images can be motivated by outrage – people are sharing images to try to raise awareness. COVID-19 has pushed more children online, often without necessary supervision, which has also impacted numbers. This risks overwhelming hotlines and highlights the need for education for the public on how and what to report.

Participants then got involved in the conversations by joining breakout rooms. Half of the group considered topics including reporting trends, who reporters are, and if there has been a notable change in reporting and reporters. The key findings were as follows:

- **Self-generated content, grooming and extortion, especially on gaming platforms, is on the rise.** Often grooming may begin on a gaming platform and the move to other platforms, where grooming continues. This makes regulation tricky. The issue of deep fakes and their legality is also of increasingly concern. This is an emerging problem and is expected to become a challenge for hotlines and LEA in the coming years.
- **We're still trying to understand the impact that COVID-19 has had on reporting.** Although there has been an overall increase, reporting patterns seem to vary across the board, with many hotlines and platforms reporting higher numbers, but others reporting little to no significant change. COVID-19 is impacting capacity building and the ability of LEA and analysts to investigate reports, however.
- **Greater collection and analysis of available data could drive improvements to processes but challenges remain.** Identifying trends in who reporters are is difficult due to the challenges of gathering data and the resources required to analyse it. Anonymous reporting is thought to encourage reporters to be more forthcoming with details, although NCMEC noted that the type of report someone is making affects what personal information they are willing to share. This is an area for development either in training or in reporting infrastructure. Improved data sharing will hopefully be a feature of the new EU centre.

The other half of the group focussed on how reporters can be reached. Their conclusions were:

- **Increase public confidence through awareness raising campaigns.** Campaigns increase public confidence and hotlines see spikes in clicks through to their websites, but it is hard to measure if this translates to more reports and their impact can be short-lived. Longer-term solutions are also required.

- **“The biggest room in the world is the room for improvement”.** We can make reporting easier now and make it easy for children to comfortably and confidently report. We can conduct additional research into reporters and how to reach them. We can encourage social media to take appropriate action on CSAM and acknowledge the problem. Young people are not reporting to tech companies because of inconsistent responses. We can call on tech companies to improve their response. We can aspire to consistency in reporting forms and fields to help prioritise certain types of reports.
- **Connecting with a wider ecosystem of other hotlines, NGOs, and LEA is crucial.** Building partnerships with social media companies is important. Getting legal recognition for hotlines could enable them to do more. Stronger co-ordination with NGOs and more emphasis on awareness raising and prevention campaigns could also be part of future solutions. We must also have the capacity to deal with reports that come in. Different countries all face the same issues, and the sharing of knowledge across borders is key.

Part 2: The importance of reporting

For the second part of the day, the focus changed to the importance of reporting, where participants heard real-world hotline accounts. We began with a presentation from ICMEC on the pros and cons of mandatory reporting, which was followed by presentations from a variety of hotlines from around the world. The key takeaways were:

- **Mandatory reporting of ISPs can has many advantages, such as incentivising corporate social responsibility, but it also comes with challenges.** Mandatory Reporting (MR) requires ISPs and ESPs to report as soon as possible to LEA on any CSAM they are made aware of. Failure to do so can result in a penalty, which should act as an incentive for companies to be proactive and responsible. MR helps create confidence in the system for law enforcement, parents, and children and ISPs are in an ideal position to report suspected CSAM to law enforcement meaning they can report more instances more easily than individuals can. However, MR can be costly, time-consuming, and requires significant resources. LEA may also lack the capacity to handle these reports. In countries where mandatory reporting is not an option, voluntary programmes and self-regulation may come into play.
- **The local context of different hotlines is varied and so different strategies for how to improve reporting are required.** In Austria there is no mandatory reporting for ISPs, and due to good co-operation between all stakeholders, LEAs and ISPs the system works well. Similarly, the small size of Estonia makes cooperation very effective. Colombia on the other hand is a mandatory reporting country, but ISPs don't have the technical capabilities to handle reporting. Te Protejo support LEA heavily and handle reporting to other countries due to lack of capacity and high turnover of staff in LEA. Finally, in Germany, reporting illegal content is considered a social responsibility requiring a team effort. MR is not currently the case, and it is feared that it would overwhelm LEA with duplicate and false reports. Instead, improved resources for hotlines and LEA could be the goal to help tackle these issues in Germany.

For more Information, please email communications@inhope.org