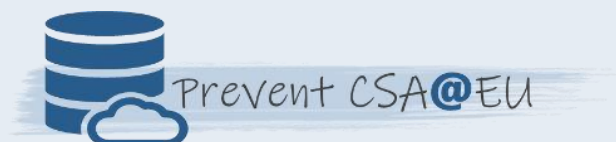


## SPECIAL ACTION

# TOWARDS A COORDINATED AND COOPERATIVE EFFORT FOR THE PREVENTION OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AT A EUROPEAN LEVEL



CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR THE SPECIFIC ACTION 'SUPPORT TO PREVENT AND COMBAT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE' [ISF/2022/SA/1.4.1.]

FUNDED BY THE INTERNAL SECURITY FUND (ISF)

STARTING DATE: FEBRUARY 1<sup>ST</sup>, 2024

DURATION: 24 MONTHS

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## Objectives of the Action

The general objective of the Special Action "Towards a Coordinated and Cooperative Effort for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse at a European level" is to strengthen existing and to explore new cooperation modes on the fight against child sexual abuse and exploitation, by building on previous research, developing new tools and by creating synergies following the rationale of the European Strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse COM(2020)607, the EU Regulation No 2021/1232, and the proposed EU Regulation COM(2022)209.

Specific objectives of the project are:

- to practically facilitate the cooperation between Greek authorities, service providers and EU services towards the effective prevention and combating of the online CSA, exploitation and grooming, especially the detection, reporting and removal of online child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and child sexual exploitation material (CSEM) and
- to contribute in setting out clear obligations and responsibilities of law enforcement, service providers, and any other relevant actors in the public and private sectors in the field of child protection, to timely and systematically take action to prevent and tackle CSA, especially online cases where the future EU Centre will focus, according to No COM(2022)209.

## Consortium

The Consortium consists of three partners:

- Institute of Child Health, Department of Mental Health and Social Welfare (leading organization)
- Foundation for Research and Technology - Hellas (FORTH), Institute of Computer Science (ISC), Distributed Computing Systems and Cybersecurity - DiSCS Lab
- Hellenic Police Headquarters, specifically:
  - the Sub-Directorate for the Protection of Minors (DPM) of the General Police Directorate of Attica,
  - the Unit of Minors Internet Protection and Digital Investigation (UMIPDI), Cyber Crime Division, and
  - the Digital Forensics Department, Hellenic Police Forensic Science Division (FSD).



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The Institute of Child Health is one of the main national stakeholders for the study and prevention of child abuse and neglect in Greece; the Institute of Computer Science of the Foundation for Research and Technology-Hellas (FORTH) is an organization working in the field of online CSA prevention through SafeLine the Greek Hotline for illegal internet content, which is member of the INHOPE network and operates at the DiSCS Lab since 2003; the three specific Police Departments are the most competent authorities in the field of law enforcement for the protection of minors in general and the protection of minors in the online environment.

### Administrative Authority

Responsible for the administration of the project at a national level is the Special Service for the Coordination and Management of Migration and Home Affairs Programmes which is supervised by the Secretary General for Migration Policy, of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. At EU level the project is funded by Internal Security Fund (ISF).

### Experts involved

Other parties to be involved during implementation at a national level are: experts to participate in the Ethics & Data Protection Board, Child-protection services and organizations (including judicial sector), Hotlines for the protection of minors, and internet service (including hosting, access, etc.) providers whereas at an international level, relevant agencies and experts.

## Working Packages

Overall, project activities are integrated in six (6) Work Packages (WPs) which are categorized according to their scope and point of interest, as listed below:

- WP0** Project Management
- WP1** Ethics & Data Protection
- WP2** Exploration of the conditions: research, reviews & linkages with relevant initiatives
- WP3** Technological solutions & tools development phase
- WP4** Pilot implementation phase
- WP5** Strengthen cooperation & Dissemination of project's results

Moreover, each partner is involved in the coordination or sole participation in each Work Package. In particular, ICH is responsible for the coordination and supervision of WP0, WP1, WP2 and WP5 while is participating in WP3 and WP4; FORTH is responsible for the coordination and supervision of WP3 and WP4 along with the Hellenic Police while participating in WP0, WP1, WP2 and WP5; Hellenic Police is participating in all WPs and has a coordinating role in WP4, along with FORTH.

### Activities of the project

In order to achieve the aforementioned specific objectives of the project, the Consortium is implementing, with the participation of relevant stakeholders and third parties as appropriate, over a two-year period, a series of activities which span the full range of Work Packages, such as:

- Forming of an Ethics & Data Protection Advisory Board which will involve representatives of the National Authority Data Protection, Child Ombudsperson, representatives of relevant Ministries, and partners' representatives /DPOs. The Board will continuously overview and monitor the implementation of project's activities and deal with ethical and practical aspects of the project related to risk, personal data protection, compliance with the national and EU regulations, legal and other relevant aspects of the project. The Board will undertake to prepare a set of recommendations on uniform processes & measures for governance and protection of personal and sensitive data of CSAM and CSEM victims and service users, namely a strategy for the governance of data of all involved parties.
- Development of research methodology (including protocols and study visits) and conducting relevant studies including the review of currently applicable national and EU legal framework for the development and maintaining of a database including CSAM and CSEM related indicators (hashes or other type of indicators) and for the collection of personal data in relation to privacy of children involved in CSAM, CSEM and grooming incidents.

- ▶ Review of national and EU legislation and practices related to CSAM, CSEM and grooming cases' administration; in addition, interviews with Prosecutors of Minors and/or other professionals in the field of justice will be conducted aiming to identify gaps in the national legislation that need to be addressed concerning the administration of online CSA cases, including child sexual exploitation, grooming cases and CSAM.
- ▶ Review of systems currently used for the classification of CSAM/CSEM types including relevant EU directives, existing work prepared by INTERPOL and taking into account the General Comment 13 of the UN Committee for the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence [CRC/C/GC/13(2011)] focusing on the legal analysis of the article 19 of the CRC.
- ▶ Development of a methodology will also occur in order to conceptually define and operationally describe indicators other than hashes on the basis of which detection of online CSA would be facilitated taking into account existing knowledge regarding offline CSA as well as the results of the above mentioned reviews along with information security and data protection frameworks that may include material confirmed by competent authorities to constitute or to have a provable link to manifestly illegal content.
- ▶ Development of an Annotated Hash Database, which will be a database collecting hashes and their annotations from a CSAM/CSEM ontology scheme or other indicators of CSA. The providers of these hashes will be mainly the Greek Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) and INHOPE's Greek Hotline for illegal Content Online (Safeline.gr), legal services and child protection-related services. LEAs will provide technical expertise under the provisions set out in the WP3, in compliance with national legislation. Relevant hash sharing will be implemented by the competent LEAs through a hash platform-interface, interconnected with a prospective national CSAM/ CSEM database developed and managed by LEAs.
- ▶ Creation of a Hash Checking Service that will allow the interfacing with LEAs and other collaborating Agencies and offer hash check capabilities to ensure whether files that contain CSAM or CSEM are either already previously identified or potentially new material. Specifically, the Service will provide three distinct HTTP based API endpoints for checking MD5 hash codes, SHA-1 hash codes, and SHA-2 hash codes, separately or in bulk. These three different services will be put in place in order to provide interoperability between the existing EU. Moreover, more research will be conducted on the matter of compatibility and interoperability in order to ensure ease of cooperation between the database and the envisaged database maintained by the EU Centre.
- ▶ Pilot implementation of the Annotated Hash Database and the Hash Checking Service in real settings for specific time period and collection of hashes and indicators for CSA with the contribution of trained relevant parties-suppliers of information, assessment of its operability and reporting.
- ▶ Development of a Guide will take place on the basis of which a series of workshops will be conducted aiming to build the capacity of ~100 first line professionals from relevant sectors (law enforcement, legal services, child protection-related services, service providers) and researchers to effectively contribute/report required data (as information suppliers), including CSAM/ CSEM indicators, and identified grooming incidents, during the piloting of the database and afterwards. This Guide will include necessary information about how to operate the Hash Checking Service as well as how to add annotations from the reference schema (Ontology).
- ▶ Participation of ISPs in a series of studies to identify commonly accepted practices that work effectively to be recommended to scale up, avoiding in this way isolated dispersed initiatives of specific providers. Specifically, focus group discussions and interviews with representatives of internet service providers will be conducted to explore currently applied practices for assessing the risk of their services misuse in relation to CSA activities, identification of CSAM, reporting of cases to the Authorities, and the potential implementation of preventive measures focused on users of their services actively searching for CSAM.

- Preparation of a set of recommendations, addressing national and EU policy making authorities to suggest working modes and initiatives towards a smooth cooperation between national public authorities and private entities and EU services.
- Synergies and systematic cooperation will be established with EU organizations who implement projects in the field of combating and prevention of online CSA with the aim of developing tools which are harmonized with current policies and prevention practices within the EU Member States and to make use of the tools produced by other EU Member States and, in particular, by the future EU Centre.
- Implementation of a mixture of dissemination activities using various traditional dissemination means such as press releases, publication of informative material online, presentations at national/international events and organization of an international conference addressing representatives of the most relevant stakeholders (e.g. EU LEAs). Dissemination activities will take place during the whole duration of the project at EU level, as the aim for the project's results is to be taken up by other EU MSs and the new European Center; the support of the relevant Policy Unit of the European Commission will be requested for planning and conduction of such activities.

## Main outcomes and results

Aiming to shape the framework in the context of which the cooperative effort for the prevention of CSA at a European level will take place and technological solutions for combating online CSA will be developed, a series of reports is prepared, including -among others:

- *Towards a common conceptual definition of online CSA*: report on existing classification systems of CSA and CSAM/CSEM types in particular
- Exploration of potential indicators, other than hashes, to be used by service providers to detect CSA online
- Report on national and EU legislation related to administration of CSA cases in general and CSAM, CSEM and grooming cases in particular
- Report on national and EU legal framework for the development and maintaining of a database including CSAM/CSEM related indicators and for the collection

of personal data in relation to privacy of children involved in CSAM, CSEM and grooming incidents

- Report on synergies with existing relevant initiatives and projects in the context of the specific action supporting combatting and prevention of CSA

The main technological outcome of the project will be a Hash Annotated Database along with the Hash Checking Service that will be piloted in real settings.

## Expected Impact

The added value of the Action is its focus on the coordinated effort to enable cooperation of all relevant parties towards the common target, to prevent online CSA, including child protection related services, technological institutions, law enforcement services and the private sector such as ISPs. The aim is to facilitate future cooperation among national authorities and the EU Centre that is going to be established, according to the provisions of the Communication EU strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse [COM(2020)607] and other relevant initiatives. Among the concrete benefits to be achieved included the proposal of a common classification system for the CSAM and CSEM in the context of a common conceptual definition of the online CSA; a pilot tested operating database including hashes for CSAM/CSEM (along with a DPIA) that could be adopted and contribute at a central level by the provisioned EU Center for the fight against online CSA; a set of online grooming and offline CSA indicators; a series of studies for the necessary conditions to operate a CSAM/CSEM database; a guide addressing relevant stakeholders to act as suppliers for the information to be collected in the database; a set of results-based recommendations to strengthen cooperation among all relevant stakeholders in the fight against CSA online and offline including a suggested strategy for governance of data of all involved parties.

For further information please contact  
**Institute of Child Health**  
 Department of Mental Health and Social Welfare  
 T. +30 210 77 15 791  
 E-mail: [ich\\_dos@otenet.gr](mailto:ich_dos@otenet.gr) | Website: [ich-mhsw.gr](http://ich-mhsw.gr)

Action's site: [prevent-csa.eu](http://prevent-csa.eu) | [prevent-csa.gr](http://prevent-csa.gr)  
 Action's e-mail: [info@prevent-csa.eu](mailto:info@prevent-csa.eu)