

GAPS AND NEEDS OF LEA  
PRACTITIONERS IN THE AREA OF

# CYBER-RELATED CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

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# The Misuse of Virtual Reality Technologies and Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence to Generate Child Sexual Abuse Material

Over recent years the use of VR headsets has grown in popularity amongst children. As the technology becomes cheaper and more mainstream, one of the disadvantages has been the significant increased uptake of this technology by offenders that are misusing VR spaces to abuse and harm children. VR spaces that particularly appeal to young people are being used by offenders focused on grooming children, with the aim to move them to private chat rooms once a rapport has been established.

Another example of advanced technology being utilised by offenders is generative artificial intelligence (GAI) applications that can create images from user text prompts.

A major challenge for law enforcement agencies is the scale that new material can be produced, its realism and difficulty to distinguish from genuine photographs. It is vital that law enforcement agencies (LEAs) can identify victims quickly, however GAI can create a forest of images quickly making it far more difficult to identify images of real abuse and therefore identify and safeguard victims quickly.

VR and GAI is amplifying pre-existing CSAE risks. Policy and legislation in particular, play an important role as technology evolves at a constant and rapid pace, and its interpretation and application to CSAE offences that take place in VR spaces, involve GAI CSAM, or both, will impact on the outcomes of police investigations. Therefore, it is essential that police investigators, digital forensic practitioners, policy makers and legislators have the necessary expertise and tools to conduct effective investigations.

The CYCLOPES practitioner workshop “Misuse of Virtual Reality Technologies and Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence to Generate Child Sexual Abuse Material” provides an opportunity and platform to discuss how to respond to these incidents, what and how evidence can be gathered, how they cooperate with public and private sector organisations and opportunities to share learning.

# Priorities of Law Enforcement in the field of the Misuse of Virtual Reality Technologies and Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence to Generate Child Sexual Abuse Material

The foundation of effective digital crime investigation lies in the ability to access and analyse data, which continues to be a priority issue for LEAs due to dealing with encrypted, erased, and cloud-stored data.

Offenders know how to exploit technical loopholes to their advantage and practitioners agreed action is needed to better protect individuals from exploitation and harm leading from the conditioning of VR and GAI environments.

In addition, focusing on victims and raising public awareness are essential components of combating digital crimes. Comprehensive support systems for victims of digital crimes need to be developed along with targeted safety awareness campaigns.

Collaboration and unified approach amongst LEAs and various stakeholders to share learning and pool resources would assist with resource constraints.

Inconsistent data retention policies and access rights hinder evidence collection and case compilation. Amongst the different European countries, the data retention times vary from 7 days to 2 years. Practitioners agreed harmonized data retention laws that balance privacy concerns with investigative needs would be highly beneficial.



# Opportunities for Development within investigations involving the Misuse of Virtual Reality Technologies and Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence to Generate Child Sexual Abuse Material

- The development of sophisticated forensic tools for VR and GAI content detection
- Improved mechanisms for victim identification and origin source material

Large volumes of data can be created for use in this type of crime and environment, which presents a number of challenges, the most important for LEAs being able to quickly identify victims. More solutions are needed to analyse and triage this data and to automate some of the manual tasks.

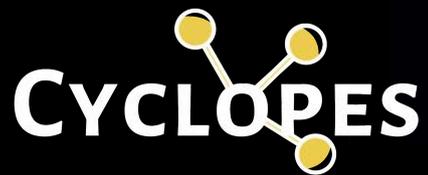
- Collaboration with tech companies to incorporate educational tools and resources into platforms
- Developing parental and school awareness programs on digital safety
- Partner with private and third sectors for comprehensive awareness campaigns

Raising awareness and engaging the community are essential for preventive measures, especially as the technology evolves at a rapid pace.

- Cooperation from ISPs and tech companies in investigations through legislative support and partnerships
- The development of triage and case management systems to expedite evidence processing

The challenges with large volumes of data also impact on evidence gathering and analysis. Establishing clear guidelines for lawful access to digital content, including cloud storage under investigation, would significantly help speed up investigations and therefore better support victims. In addition to this, the development of international agreements to facilitate cross-border digital investigations and evidence sharing would assist with timely prosecutions.





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