



Online child sexual exploitation

This term appears to have a generally agreed meaning and/or can be used without stigmatising and/or otherwise harming the child.

As previously explained, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children increasingly take place on or through the Internet, or with some connection to the online environment. Just as child sexual abuse and exploitation offline can take on a variety of forms, so can online abuse and exploitation. What is important to note is that the term “online child sexual exploitation” refers to the use of the Internet as a *means* to exploit children sexually. Indeed, the terms “ICT-facilitated”¹²⁶ and “cyber-enabled”¹²⁷ child sexual exploitation are sometimes used as alternatives to define these practices.

The reference to “online child sexual exploitation” includes all acts of a sexually exploitative nature carried out against a child that have, at some stage, a connection to the online environment. It includes any use of ICT that results in sexual exploitation or causes a child to be sexually exploited or that results in or causes images or other material documenting such sexual exploitation to be produced, bought, sold, possessed, distributed, or transmitted. This notion can thus encompass (but is not limited to):

- sexual exploitation that is carried out while the victim is online (such as enticing/manipulating/ threatening a child into performing sexual acts in front of a webcam¹²⁸)
- identifying and/or grooming potential child victims online with a view to exploiting them sexually (whether the acts that follow are then carried out online or offline)
- the distribution, dissemination, importing, exporting, offering, selling, possession of, or knowingly obtaining access to child sexual exploitation material online (even if the sexual abuse that is depicted in the material was carried out offline)

Conclusion: The line between child sexual exploitation online and offline is often blurred and, with the rapid evolution of ICTs, child sexual exploitation with some online component is increasingly common. While the term “online child sexual exploitation” can be used as an umbrella-term to indicate such forms of sexual exploitation that have an online component or a relation to the Internet, it should be recalled that the Internet is a means, albeit very potent, to exploit children sexually; it is not, in and by itself, a distinct type of sexual exploitation.

¹²⁶ UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “Study on the Effects of New Information Technologies on the Abuse and Exploitation of Children”, May 2015.

¹²⁷ M. McGuire and S. Dowling, *Cyber Crime: A Review of the Evidence*, Research Report 75, Chapter 3: “Cyber-Enabled Crimes – Sexual Offending against Children”, UK Home Office, October 2013, p. 4.

¹²⁸ A webcam is a video camera that feeds or streams its image in real time to or through a computer-to-computer network. A video stream may be viewed, saved, or sent on to other networks, for instance via the Internet. A webcam is usually connected by a cable to a computer or built into computer hardware. What it records can be seen on a web-site or on another computer as it happens. Webcams can also be wirelessly connected or connected to a local area network (LAN).