

Communiqué de presse

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At the *Paris Peace Forum*, Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom are calling for global initiatives to the reinforce the protection of children online.

Over the past few years substantial steps to address the challenge of protecting children online have been taken. Legal instruments and policy frameworks have been put in place to safeguard the rights and interests of children online, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Online Safety Act 2021 in Australia, the Online Safety Act 2023 in the United Kingdom, the European Union's Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the Digital Services Act have provided guidance on how to ensure a safe digital environment for children.

Yet, children from a younger and younger age are being increasingly exposed to harmful content, particularly pornographic content, cyberbullying, content leading to psychological problems such as self-harming behaviour, online sexual abuse, excessive data harvesting when using digital services and applications and excessive screen-use.

Data speaks for itself: most adolescents have encountered online pornography with recent research indicating that the average age of encounter is at 12-13 years oldⁱ; globally, one third of children has reported being the target of cyberbullying and the number of online child sexual abuse content nearly doubled between 2017 and 2019.

We, Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom therefore, express our determination to effectively strengthen the protection of children online. We are convinced that highly effective privacy preserving **age verification and age estimation online, plays an important role to reach this objective, especially to prevent early exposure of children to pornographic content.** We recognize the **initiatives, such as legislations or policy measures, already undertaken by several European countries, including in their capacity as Members of the European Union along with the European Commission and the upcoming Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU, by the United-Kingdom, and the private sector and seek to build on these.**

The "Paris Peace Forum" meeting to take place on November 10 and 11, will build on the momentum and will discuss new initiatives to protect children online.

ⁱ Common Sense, 2023; eSafety Commissioner 2023