

European Crime Prevention Award (ECPA)

Annex I

Approved by the EUCPN Management Board in 2018

Please complete the template in English in compliance with the ECPA criteria contained in the Rules and procedures for awarding and presenting the European Crime Prevention Award (Par.2 §3).

General information

1. Please specify your country.

Latvia

2. Is this your country's ECPA entry or an additional project?

ECPA entry

3. What is the title of the project?

"Dangerous friendship on the internet"

4. Who is responsible for the project? Contact details.

Latvian Safer Internet Centre

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5. Start date of the project (dd/mm/yyyy)? Is the project still running (Yes/No)? If not, please provide the end date of the project.

June 2021

Yes, the project is still running

6. Where can we find more information about the project? Please provide links to the project's website or online reports or publications (preferably in English).

Description in English available in the Better Internet for Kids website of European Safer Internet Centres:

<https://www.betterinternetforkids.eu/resources/resource?id=129509>

Information about the campaign "Dangerous friendship on the internet", developed self-help tool to prevent grooming of children and developed

supplementing materials available in the website of Latvian Safer Internet Centre (in Latvian): <https://drossinternets.lv/lv/info/bistama-draudziba-interneta>

7. Please give a **one page** description of the project (**Max. 600 words**)

"Dangerous friendship on the internet" is a project with the aim to prevent children from becoming victims of online grooming. The Project aims to make children, youngsters, their parents, pedagogues and social workers to recognize online grooming, react adequately and prevent potential sexual abuse committed to children online and offline. The project includes:

- 1) Campaign to inform the society about grooming risks and inviting children to test their online friendships;
- 2) Development of a tool in the form of an online test to recognize grooming, prevent children from being groomed and encouraging them to seek for a help;
- 3) Development of educational and awareness materials – posters, brochures and online posts for dissemination throughout the country.

During the campaign a rhetoric question is asked - Online friendship or abuse? Innocent questions or attempted grooming? A self-help test at sos.drossinternets.lv helps to recognize grooming on the internet. Children and young people, as well as parents and educators are invited to fill out the self-help test developed by experts from the Latvian Safer Internet Centre, the State Police and State Inspectorate for the Protection of Children's rights to test how safe the online friendship is, to learn how to recognize grooming cases and where to seek for a help.

The self-help test is intended for:

- 1) Children, so that they can test their online friendship, especially if the child has never met the person face-to-face and is not sure if the person can be trusted.
- 2) Specialists working with children and parents or the child's legal representatives. If a child has made an online friendship and adults suspect that this friendship could harm the child, the test will help to understand if the child has experienced online grooming as well as receive instructions on the next steps.

The test consists of 12 to 20 questions depending on the age group. And questions are related to violations of criminal law against children. For instance:

- Did your "friend" send you something that made you feel fearful, ashamed, confused?
- Did your "friend" talk to you about intimate body parts?
- Did your "friend" try to persuade you or force you to take a photo or film yourself naked?
- Did your friend send you a photo, video, or link where you can see a naked adult or parts of his or her intimate body?
- Did your "friend" ask you to keep your communication as a secret?

After answering to all the questions results are shown with advises what to do and where to get support if the answers indicate that the child may have suffered from grooming. At the end, person can see which exactly answers indicate to potential criminal or harmful activity.

Example of results after completing the test:




Notestē savu draudzību internetā! Aizpildi testu!

Vai Leo tev draudēja nodarīt pāri, ja tu nedarīsi, ko Leo vēlas?

Nē

Tavas atbildes uz jautājumiem norāda, ka Leo, iespējams, tevi pavedināja internetā.

Ieteikumi:

-  Piezvani pa Uzticības tālruni [116111](tel:116111) vai mājas lapā uzticibastalrunis.lv uzraksti čātā un saņem palīdzību!
-  Pārtrauc sazināties ar šo cilvēku!
Saglabā saraksti, fotogrāfijas vai video!
-  Pastāsti par notikušo saviem vecākiem vai pieaugušajam, kuram tu uzticies!
-  Saglabā savus sociālo tīklu profilus!

Apskati [šeit](#) savas atbildes, kuras norāda, ka, iespējams, pret tevi ir veikts likumpārkāpums.

I. The project shall focus on prevention and/or reduction of everyday crime and fear of crime within the theme.

8. Which **crime prevention/ reduction mechanisms** were used in this project to contribute to crime prevention and/or the reduction of crime or the fear of crime? Multiple answers are possible.

Establishing and maintaining normative barriers to committing criminal acts

e.g. 'Offenders, we are watching you' campaigns

Reducing recruitment to criminal social environments and activities by eliminating or reducing the social and individual causes and processes that lead to criminality

e.g. social and financial support for disadvantaged families

- Deterring** potential perpetrators from committing crimes through the threat of punishment
e.g. decreasing the time between arrest and punishment
- Disrupting** criminal acts by stopping them before they are carried out
e.g. increasing police patrols in vulnerable areas
- Protecting vulnerable targets** by reducing opportunities and make it more demanding to carry out criminal acts
e.g. placing locks and cameras
- Reducing the harmful consequences** of criminal acts
e.g. initiatives to recover stolen goods
- Reducing the rewards** from criminal acts
e.g. restorative justice programmes
- Incapacitating** (or neutralising) perpetrators by denying them the ability (capacity) to carry out new criminal acts
e.g. imprisonment of key gang members
- Encouraging** desistance from crime and rehabilitating former offenders so they are able to settle back into a normal life
e.g. prison rehabilitation programs

Explain how this/these crime prevention mechanisms were used ((**Max. 300 words**))

With the campaign "Dangerous friendship on the internet" awareness of the society was raised about grooming risks, attracting great media attention and encouraging public discussions thus the offenders know that children are warned about the risks that might occur when talking online to strangers, and children are encouraged to seek for a help and inform adults about the person who has conducted illegal activities.

Also, by equipping children with necessary information it is possible to disrupt criminal acts by stopping them before they are carried out. Because children know which questions asked by abuser should make them careful and show the correspondence to an adult.

With a 24/7 online friendship testing tool, children can use the test any time they have a suspicion, concern or worry about the communication style of their online 'friend' to understand whether their friendship is harmful and to get support from psychologists. This can stop communication with the abuser before the child has shared naked pictures and been blackmailed.

Developed self-help test directly increased awareness of potential victims (children) as well as adults who were also able to fill in the self-help test based on the information they have. Thus also parents were able to diagnose potential risks of their child online friendship and understand when assistance is needed.

II. The project shall have been evaluated and have achieved most or all of its objectives. For more information on evaluation, click [here](#)

9. What were the reasons for setting up the project? Was this context analysed before the project was initiated and in what way (How, and by whom? Which data were used?)? In what way did this analysis inform the set-up of the project? (**Max. 150 words**)

In 2021 The State Police initiated 55 criminal cases about grooming activities; and 40 criminal cases about dissemination of child sexual abuse images.

However, reports from the State Police investigators indicate that situation with latent criminality online is worrying since children feel guilty about the communication they have been involved in and they hide their experience from adults. Even during police questioning of victims - children tend to lie to police officers and deny that they have suffered, mainly because their parents or pedagogues did not respond adequately at first, they blamed and shamed the child.

In 2021 [Children Helpline 116111](#) has recorded 105 calls from children who were worried about grooming and unsolicited contact from strangers online. Furthermore, [Hotline statistics](#) of Latvian Safer Internet Centre show that in Year 2021 the number of reports about child sexual abuse images online reached 22'925. When analysing the content of the reports, it is clear that the number of self-generated nude photos of children has increased significantly, half of all the reports contained self-generated images of children themselves.

Psychologists who are involved in the investigation process state that minors who have experienced sexual offenses on the Internet have various changes in their psycho-emotional state (for example: guilt, fear, shame, helplessness) and behaviour (avoiding places and things that resemble experiences, sleep disturbances, depressed mood). In addition, sexual offenses on the Internet, for instance, naked images of minors, often are published online either by the perpetrator or peers. Thus, sexual offenses in the Internet can have significant impact not only on psycho-emotional state and behaviour of the child, but also on the minor's future life (for example, job opportunities, public image).

The above statistics and expert observations led to the idea of developing a self-help tool to help children realise that a crime has been committed against them and to seek help. The advice material for parents and adults was also developed to ensure that parents react adequately to such situations, helping and supporting the child instead of overreacting and frightening the child even more.

10. What were the objective(s) of the project? Please, if applicable, distinguish between main and secondary objectives. (**Max. 150 words**)

The main objective is to ensure that children, youngsters, their parents, pedagogues and social workers are able to recognize online grooming, react adequately and prevent potential sexual abuse committed to children online and offline.

11. Has there been a process evaluation?¹ Who conducted the evaluation (internally or externally?) and what were the main results? Which indicators were used to measure the process? Did you make changes accordingly? (**max. 300 words**)

As there were no deviations from the original plan during the implementation of the project activities, a process evaluation was not necessary.

12. Has there been an outcome² or impact³ evaluation? Who conducted the evaluation (internally or externally?), which data and evaluation method were used and what were the main results? Which indicators were used to measure the impact? (**Max. 300 words**)

Yes, the results of filled out test show the impact of the project, and also increased number of calls to Children helpline 116111.

Since February 8, 2022 when the campaign was launched and test was made accessible at sos.drossinternets.lv, it has been filled out by 6677 children and youngsters: 4356 children of age 8-15 years old and 2321 youngsters 16-17 years old. The test questions

¹ **Process evaluation:** Also called *implementation evaluation*, or *monitoring*, this process documents **how the activities were implemented** in order to determine any deviations from the original planning. It facilitates finding explanations for when the results of the intervention are not as expected.

² **Outcome evaluation:** Measures the **direct effect** (i.e., extent of the changes) **of the intervention on the target group, population, or geographic area**. The information produced by the outcome evaluation determines at what level the **objectives were achieved**.

³ **Impact evaluation:** Measures **long-term effects** of the intervention on the target group, as well as **indirect effects** on the broader community. The information produced by the impact evaluation determines at what level the **ultimate goals** of the intervention were achieved.

for these two age groups differed since they are related to violations of criminal law against children, and the law differs according to the age of a child.

The children's answers to the test questions indicate the following situation in Latvia:

1. Did your "online friend" send you something that made you feel fearful, ashamed, confused? Yes 20%
2. Did your "online friend" talk to you about intimate body parts? Yes 26%
3. Did your "online friend" try to persuade you or force you to take a photo of yourself naked? Yes 17%
 - And did you actually take a picture, did you film yourself naked? Yes 60%
4. Did your "online friend" send you a photo where you can see a naked adult? Yes 20%
5. Did your "online friend" send you a photo where you can see a naked child? Yes 13%
6. Did your "online friend" ask you to keep your communication as a secret? Yes 21%
7. Did "online friend" promise you money or gifts if you did what he wanted? Yes 17%
8. Did your "online friend" threaten you if you didn't do what he wanted? Yes 14%

As stated before, in 2021 The State Police initiated:

- 55 criminal cases with 150 episodes (113 victims i.e., 100 girls and 13 boys) about grooming activities; and
- 40 criminal cases with 86 episodes about dissemination of child sexual abuse images.

However after starting self-test project in first 6 months of 2022 State police of Latvia already initiated:

- 32 criminal cases about grooming activities (58% from total number of 2021); and
- 24 criminal cases about dissemination of child sexual abuse images (60% from total number of 2021).

Therefore increase in criminal cases can be indicated.

We can conclude that 20% of children who have online friendships have been victims of online grooming. That is more than 1300 children in six months. If we compare these results with statistics of the State police, it is clear that the latency of these crimes is high, because only 55 such cases (113 victims, i.e., only 8% from potential 1300 victims) came to the attention of the State Police in Year 2021.

In addition, the number of calls to the 116111 children helpline shows that they needed the campaign and the tool: in 2022 six months, the number of calls to the helpline related to unwanted contact and grooming on the internet has doubled compared to the same period in 2021.

III. The project shall, as far as possible, be innovative, involving new methods or new approaches.

13. How is the project innovative in its methods and/or approaches? (**Max. 150 words**)

Previously there was no practical tool available to help minors, professionals and parents understand whether experienced situation is a crime or a harmful content or conduct.

Considering that most often children and youngsters are ashamed of telling someone about grooming, sexting and other traumatic experience online, an anonymous situation evaluation tool (a self-help test) provide support and help them to make the right decisions about the next steps. In addition, it encourages the victim to report the crime to helpline or hotline, helping to detect and prevent sex offenses in the Internet.

Nowadays children are used to and prefer to communicate online, so it is not always easy for them to call a helpline or talk to an adult. But an anonymous test gives children information and warns them if it is suspected that they might be being groomed. The child therefore receives immediate feedback on what might have happened and what he/she should do.

IV. The project shall be based on cooperation between partners, where possible.

14. Which partners or stakeholders were involved in the project and what was their involvement? (**Max. 200 words**)

Latvian Safer Internet Centre – coordination of the Project, development of content for the self-help test and supplementing awareness materials, organization of the campaign, dissemination of information.

The State Police of Latvia – co-development of the content of self-help test and awareness materials, dissemination of information to society and educating police officers about the grooming problem.

State Inspectorate for Protection of Children’s Rights - co-development of the content of self-help test and awareness materials, dissemination of information to society and ensuring the work of Child helpline 116111 encouraging children who have suffered from grooming to reach out and seek for a help.

V. The project shall be capable of replication in other Member States.

15. How and by whom is the project funded? (**Max. 150 words**)

50% co-funding from the EU funding instrument “Connecting Europe Facility” to ensure the work and activities of Latvian Safer Internet Centre.

50% national co-funding.

16. What were the costs of the project in terms of finances, material and human resources? (**Max. 150 words**)

Approximate costs for human resources, technical development of the test platform and organization of campaign were 40'000 Eur.

17. Has a cost-benefit analysis⁴ been carried out? If so, describe the analysis, including how and by whom it was carried out and list the main findings of the analysis. (**Max. 150 words**)

No

18. Are there adjustments to be made to the project to ensure a successful replication in another Member State?

Legislation on online grooming may differ in other countries, so anyone wishing to use this tool in their own country should review the relevant articles of legislation.

In summer 2022, the tool was voted as the best tool developed by the European Safer Internet Centres for adaptation in other countries. The plan is therefore to translate all texts (test questions and instructions, poster tips, brochures) into English by the end of 2022 and to offer the test on the platform in English as well.

19. How is the project relevant for other Member States? Please explain the European dimension of your project.

EU Kids Online 2020 Survey⁵ results show that on average 80% of children 9-16 years old use internet at least once per day, and they spend 2-3 hours online. Also 37% of European children admit to communicating online with someone they don't know in real life which might lead to the grooming risks. And experience of the European Safer Internet Centres shows that the distribution of self-generated sexual images of children, as well as online

⁴ **Cost-benefit analysis:** A type of economic evaluation that compares the direct and indirect cost of the resources employed in the intervention, with the equivalent economic value of the benefits.

⁵ <https://www.eukidsonline.ch/files/Eu-kids-online-2020-international-report.pdf>

grooming and abuse of children, is becoming an increasingly important issue in their daily work that has to be addressed.

Please provide a short general description of the project (abstract for inclusion in the conference booklet – **max. 150 words**).

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- 3) Development of educational and awareness materials – posters, brochures and online posts for dissemination throughout the country.

A self-help test at sos.drossinternets.lv helps to recognize grooming on the internet.

After answering to all the questions results are shown with advises what to do and where to get support if the answers indicate that the child may have suffered from grooming.

Since February 8, 2022 when the campaign was launched and test was made accessible, it has been filled out by 6677 children and youngsters.

Analysing children answers to the questions we can conclude that 20% of children who have online friendships have been victims of online grooming. That is more than 1300 children during six months period. If we compare these results with statistics of the State police, it is clear that the latency of these crimes is high, because only 55 such cases (113 victims, i.e., only 8% from potential 1300 victims) 100 such cases came to the attention of the State Police in Year 2021.