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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[3 February 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The United Nations Must Take Action to Protect Children From Violations Of Their Rights Resulting From Exposure to Pornography

1. Introduction

European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Europeen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'Homme (ECLJ) wishes to highlight the serious violations of the rights of the child resulting from early exposure to pornography. The few measures that States are taking to try to remedy remain largely inefficient. Currently, an estimated 50% of internet traffic is sex-related⁽¹⁾ and more than a quarter (27%) of the world's video web traffic involves pornography.⁽²⁾ Yet violence is omnipresent in it: in the 50 most popular porn videos, 88% of the scenes contain physical violence and 49% contain at least one verbal aggression.⁽³⁾

2. Background

Pornography is supposed to be reserved for adults, but children⁽⁴⁾ are more and more exposed to it, in a very early and intensive way. According to a 2017 French study, 63% of boys and 37% of girls aged 15 to 17 have already watched pornographic films, while this same figure was 53% among boys in 2013 (+10 points in four years).⁽⁵⁾ In 2022 in the United States of America, 73% of 13-17-year-olds have been exposed to online pornography, the average first viewing occurs at the age of 12, and 59% of 13-17-year-olds who intentionally watch pornography do so weekly or more often.⁽⁶⁾ In 2022 in Poland, the average first viewing of pornography occurs just before the age of 11 and nearly one in four 16-year-old (23.9%) who watch porn admits doing so daily; among the 12-14-year-old, the figure is just over one in five (21.5%).

This massive consumption can be explained by the new digital era which made pornography freely, anonymously, unlimitedly accessible everywhere and at any time, even at school⁽⁸⁾ via smartphones, which are increasingly common among minors. In Poland, this type of device is the main way they access this content for 76.2% of the 16-year-old and 66.9% of the 12-14-year-old surveyed. The covid-19 pandemic has aggravated the phenomenon of exposure to pornography through successive lockdowns.⁽¹⁰⁾ Finally, children are victims of the "fierce marketing of the porn industry" which uses "various techniques [...]" to attract unwilling Internet users^{:(11)} they represent a significant financial windfall and are the customers of tomorrow.⁽¹²⁾

3. Violations

The consequences of children's exposure to pornography are devastating. They are very vulnerable to it because of their sensitivity to dopamine⁽¹³⁾ and the plasticity of their brains.⁽¹⁴⁾ The risk of developing addictive behaviours due to the consumption of pornography is proven: neurosciences now show that the brain's reaction to pornography is similar to that caused by hard drugs. But such an addiction, unlike others, is difficult to stop because pornography is always accessible, affordable, anonymous, and unlimited.

The use of pornography by children is linked to "lower levels of social integration and higher levels of undesirable behaviour [...] higher incidence of depressive symptoms and reduced emotional bonding with caregivers." It undermines "their self-esteem, well-being, relationships, equal opportunities and achievements in school."⁽¹⁷⁾ Viewing pornography by young children "[can] induce mental and behavioral disturbances similar to those of sexual abuse."⁽¹⁸⁾

While "pornography has increasingly become one of the main sources of information on sex and sexuality for young people,"⁽¹⁹⁾ it leads to the development of an unrealistic and distorted vision of them. Thus, the likelihood that young people will accept and engage in harmful and risky sexual behaviours for themselves and others increases: early sexual

activity,(20) sexting,(21) multiple sexual partners, risky sexual practices, use of psychoactive substances and vulnerability to STD.(22)

In general, pornography consumption is associated with an increase in verbal and physical aggression.(23) Among young people, a correlation between pornography and sexual violence is found, as in the case of “[X], 15 years old (...), who has been indicted for sexual assaults on girls in his school and for the rape of two of his neighbours who are less than 10 years old.”(24)

4. Recommendations

States are responsible for guaranteeing the internationally recognised rights of the child, in particular by the CRC. We urge this Council to remind the States of:

- on the one hand, their obligations in the field of protection of children, in particular “from information and material injurious to his or her well-being [...]” (CRC, art. 17.e.), of which pornography is obviously a part;
- on the other hand, for States Parties to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Circulation of and Traffic in Obscene Publications, the obligations deriving from it.

We also urge this Council to invite the States to take concrete action by implementing in good faith existing national and supranational texts that can be used as a legal basis for the fight against the exposure of children to pornography.

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1. PACE, Gender aspects and human rights implications of pornography, Report, Doc. 15406, 18 November 2021, § 12-13.
 2. A. Billon, A. Borchio Fontimp, L. Cohen, L. Rossignol, « Porno : L’enfer du décor », French Senate, 27 September 2022, p. 21.
 3. Ana J. Bridges, Robert Wosnitzer, Erica Scharrer, Chyng Sun, Rachael Liberman, “Aggression and Sexual Behavior in Best-Selling Pornography Videos: A Content Analysis Update”, *Violence against Women* 16, no. 10 (2010): 1065-1085.
 4. “Child” is “every human being below the age of eighteen years” within the meaning of the CRC (1989).
 5. « Les adolescents et le porno : vers une «Génération Youporn» ? », IFOP study for the Observatoire de la Parentalité et de l’Education Numérique (21-27 February 2017), p. 9-10.
 6. Robb, M.B., & Mann, S., *Teens and pornography*, Research report, Common Sense, 2023, p. 8.
 8. Robb, M.B., & Mann, S., *Teens and pornography*, op. cit., p. 15.
 10. OSCE and UN Women, *Guidance. Addressing emerging human trafficking trends and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic*, July 2020, p. 32.
 11. Ennoccence, *Réseaux sociaux, streaming, live streaming et téléchargement illégal : nouvelles portes d’entrée des enfants vers le monde de la pornographie, premier pas vers une sensibilisation de notre société sur ces sujets*, 2016, p. 21-25.
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 13. University of Pittsburg, “Teen Brains Over-Process Rewards, Suggesting Root of Risky Behavior, Mental Ills”, *Phys.org*, January 2011.
 14. Jay N. Giedd, “The Amazing Teen Brain”, *Scientific American*, June 2015, 32-37.
 17. PACE, *Fighting the over-sexualisation of children*, Resolution 2119 (2016), 21 June 2016, § 2.
 18. Collectif Interassociatif Enfance Médias (CIEM), *L’environnement médiatique des jeunes de 0 à 18 ans : Que transmettons-nous à nos enfants ?*, Report, May 2002, p. 39.
 19. PACE, Gender aspects and human rights implications of pornography, Report, Doc. 15406, 18 November 2021, §17.
 20. « Les adolescents et le porno : vers une «Génération Youporn» ? », IFOP, op. cit., p. 11 : “71% of teens who have ever had sex have surfed a pornographic site in their lifetime. As a reminder, the average for all teens is 51%” (our translation).

21. Lanzarote Committee, Opinion on child sexually suggestive or explicit images and/or videos generated, shared and received by children, 06 June 2019.
22. Elizabeth M. Morgan, "Associations between Young Adults' Use of Sexually Explicit Materials and Their Sexual Preference, Behaviors, and Satisfaction", *The Journal of Sex Research* 48, no. 6 (2011): 520-530.
23. Paul J. Wright, Robert S. Tokunaga, et Ashley Kraus, "A Meta-Analysis of Pornography Consumption and Actual Acts of Sexual Aggression in General Population Studies", *Journal of Communication* 66, no. 1 (2016): 183-205.
24. Barbara Smaniotto, « Réflexions autour de l'impact de la pornographie... sur la sexualité adolescente », *Revue de l'enfance et de l'adolescence*, 2017/1, p. 47-56. See also Bonino S., Ciairano S., Rabaglietti E., Cattelino E., Use of pornography and self-reported engagement in sexual violence among adolescents, *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 2006, nr 3.