



Press Release

Launching LEAGUE, a project addressing the further need of preventing and increasing the reporting of online child sexual abuse of boys aged 10-18.

During the pandemic the number of the reported cases of sexually exploited and/ or abused children has significantly increased. Hence, the aim of the LEAGUE project is to address these issues by raising the awareness and by elaborating tools to effectively face the novel concerns.

On the 23rd of February 2022 was held the kick-off meeting of the LEAGUE project, which is funded by the CERV programme of the European Commission and coordinated by Law and Internet Foundation (LIF). The specific target group of LEAGUE are boys aged 10-18 as well as their parents, educators and other relevant professionals. The aim of the two-year project is to prevent online child sexual abuse of boys, to strengthen the capacity of the professionals and to increase attention as well as online safety. The LEAGUE consortium consists of five organisations from five different EU countries, namely: Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, and Slovenia.

During the course of the project the consortium will develop:

- a series of national and international trainings targeting professionals as well as parents and educators with the aim of educating them on the issue and introducing them to the state-of-the-art knowledge.
- an online Platform and Chatbot offering peer-to-peer support for boys aged between 10 and 18 years.

The relevance of the project originates from the COVID-19 pandemic and the related increase in the use of the internet by children and young people worldwide. According to studies and reports from international organisations like INTERPOL, ECPAT International and UNICEF, there has not only been a rise in the usage of the internet (and all associated online networks such as social media channels, gaming portals and streaming services) but also a significant increase in the reported cases of Online Child Sexual Abuse (OCSA), since technological advancements have made it easier for perpetrators to contact children.

Another important aspect of the project refers to the selection of the main target group, namely boys between 10 and 18 years old. Although often overseen, 30.5 % of the children, who are victims of OCSA are boys. Moreover, the materials in which boys are included show in many cases more violence and more severe scenes than material including girls. Besides, boys are more unwilling to open up to a person of trust or to report such incidents in general. This means that the actual number of OCSA cases might be much higher.

To raise awareness regarding this issue and to address the importance of prevention measures and reporting, the LEAGUE project follows two different activity streams. The first stream includes the organization of two international trainings in Vienna, which are thematically addressing professional groups like social workers, carers or law enforcement representatives. Furthermore, every consortium partner has to conduct four national trainings, especially reaching out to teachers, school psychologists and parents. The second stream incorporates the creation of a child-friendly internet platform and a chatbot, where boys can seek for information regarding OCSA and their rights. These activities are rounded off by an intensive dissemination and exploitation strategy.



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