

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001217/25
to the Commission
Ioan-Rareş Bogdan (PPE)
(24 March 2025)**

Subject: Protection of minors from risks associated with the ‘dark web’ — Commission measures and strategies

I welcome the Commission’s initiative to allocate resources to the fight against the illegal trafficking of drugs, explosives, weapons and harmful content which circulate via the hidden networks known as the ‘dark web’.

In view of the growing alarms being sounded by parents’ associations, I feel I should ask the following questions:

1. Are there any official studies or statistics on the exposure of minors to the dark web and the risks associated with it?
2. Does the Commission have up-to-date information on the scale of the trade in illegal and harmful goods via the dark web?
3. What concrete strategies and measures does the Commission have to prevent minors’ ever-increasing access and exposure to harmful content on the Internet and the dark web, bearing in mind the adverse impact this has on their development and on families?

I look forward with interest to the Commission’s answers and to learning what measures it is considering to address these challenges.

Submitted: 24.3.2025

**Answer given by Executive Vice-President Virkkunen on behalf of the European Commission
(19 May 2025)**

The Commission is not aware of any official reports on the specific issue of the exposure of minors to the dark web. However, the broader issue of cybercrime and the dark web is covered, among other things, in Europol’s latest Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment ⁽¹⁾. This report covers criminal activity linked to minors on the dark web.

Similarly, while there are no comprehensive official statistics on the scale of trade in illegal and harmful goods on the dark web, Europol’s European Cybercrime Centre has coordinated enforcement actions against illegal dark web marketplaces ⁽²⁾. Europol will continue to enforce actions against cybercrime into this area in coordination with other authorities.

The Commission focuses on enforcing the Digital Services Act (DSA) ⁽³⁾, where Protection of Minors is an enforcement priority ⁽⁴⁾. Specifically, the Commission is preparing guidelines for the protections of minors of the DSA ⁽⁵⁾. Furthermore, the European strategy for a better Internet for kids (BIK+) ⁽⁶⁾ promotes responsible technology use among children, carers and teachers through Safer Internet Centres and the BIK platform ⁽⁷⁾.

The proposal for a regulation to prevent and combat child sexual abuse ⁽⁸⁾ would require companies to systematically detect, assess, prevent, report and block online child sexual abuse. The recast of the directive on combating sexual abuse ⁽⁹⁾ introduces a new offence: operating online services for the purpose of online child sexual abuse, including on the dark web.

The Commission plans to propose a Digital Fairness Act to address gaps in EU consumer protection with a special focus on minors online. ⁽¹⁰⁾

The Commission plans to carry out an EU-wide inquiry on the broader impacts of social media on mental health and wellbeing, focusing on young people ⁽¹¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publication-events/main-reports/Internet-organised-crime-threat-assessment-iocta-2024>.

⁽²⁾ Against the so-called Wall Street marketplace and Silkkitie Marketplace: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/international-sting-against-dark-web-vendors-leads-to-179-arrests>; <https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/double-blow-to-dark-web-marketplaces>.

⁽³⁾ Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act) (Text with EEA relevance).

⁽⁴⁾ The Commission has initiated proceedings against TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook based on suspicions that they may have breached DSA in areas related to the harmful effects on minors of their systems. Find all information here: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/list-designated-vlops-and-vloses>.

⁽⁵⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-launches-call-evidence-guidelines-protection-minors-online-under-digital-services-act>.

⁽⁶⁾ COM(2022)0212 final.

⁽⁷⁾ <https://www.betterInternetforkids.eu>.

⁽⁸⁾ Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down rules to prevent and combat child sexual abuse, COM(2022)0209 final of 11.05.2022, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2022%3A209%3AFIN>.

⁽⁹⁾ Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child sexual abuse material and replacing Council Framework Decision 2004/68/JHA (recast), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52024PC0060>.

⁽¹⁰⁾ The Commission plans to propose it in the second half of 2026. Subject to the impact assessment, it will tackle issues concerning influencer marketing, unfair personalisation, dark patterns or addictive design.

⁽¹¹⁾ https://commission.europa.eu/priorities-2024-2029_en.