

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002868/26
to the Commission**

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(13 July 2026)

Subject: Missing and runaway children as an indicator of violence, abuse and grooming

According to Missing Children Europe's 2025 Figures and Trends report, published in June 2026, runaway children accounted for 58% of cases reported to Europe's 116 000 hotline network for missing children in 2025.

Missing Children Europe, AMBER Alert Europe and other watchdog organisations warn that running away is often the final result of violence, including bullying, both online and offline, and of grooming.

Bullying and grooming increasingly occur online. While very large online platforms (VLOPs), especially Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok, are well-known channels, the misuse of chat and messaging features within online multiplayer games for the purpose of grooming remains less known, documented and addressed.

1. Will the Commission promote use of return home interviews and standardised indicators across Member States to identify whether grooming or violence preceded a child's disappearance?
2. How does the Commission intend to use existing instruments, especially the Digital Services Act, to improve the early detection of violence that may lead to children going missing or running away?
3. Does the Commission intend to assess how online grooming, including through chat and messaging features within online multiplayer games, contributes to cases involving missing or runaway children and identify the main channels involved?

Submitted: 13.7.2026

Answer given by Mr Brunner on behalf of the European Commission

(13 October 2026)

The Commission promotes child-centred approaches, in line with the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child⁽¹⁾. Missing and runaway children must be approached first and foremost as children at risk.

Child-centred, trauma-informed follow-up mechanisms, including return home interviews, should be carried out in line with the child's rights, best interests, dignity and safety.

Child protection systems remain within the competence of Member States.

The Digital Services Act⁽²⁾ obliges providers of online platforms accessible to minors to put in place appropriate and proportionate measures to ensure a high level of privacy, safety, and security of minors, on their service.

In that context, the Commission issued guidelines⁽³⁾ containing clear measures that platforms should implement to prevent inappropriate contacts online, including the recruitment of minors for criminal purposes, grooming, and cyberbullying.

The proposed Regulation on preventing and combatting child sexual abuse ('the proposal')⁽⁴⁾ includes obligations for providers of relevant information society services, including chat and messaging services, to prevent and, if necessary, to detect and report the grooming of children. The Commission will continue to support the co-legislators in reaching an agreement as soon as possible on the proposal.

The proposal also includes the creation of a European Centre to prevent and combat child sexual abuse ('EU Centre').

One of the proposed tasks for the EU Centre is the collection and analysis of information and the sharing of knowledge and expertise concerning matters regarding the prevention and combating of online child sexual abuse, including grooming.

⁽¹⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0142>.

⁽²⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/2065/oj/eng>.

⁽³⁾ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C_202505519.

⁽⁴⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2022%3A209%3AFIN>.