(English version)

Priority question for written answer P-000506/25
to the Commission
Evin Incir (S&D)
(5 February 2025)

Subject: The need for an urgent action plan to combat criminal networks and prevent children and young people from being recruited into organised crime

Almost 70% of the criminal networks operating in the EU are active in more than three countries and they are increasingly recruiting children and young people on digital platforms.

These criminals use influencer language, emotional manipulation and grooming techniques and present crimes as 'challenges' or 'missions'. This 'gamification' is used to encourage children and young people to commit crimes including murder, transporting narcotics or planting bombs for money.

In Sweden alone, over 32 bomb attacks have been carried out since the beginning of this year, many of them by children and young people.

Preventing the recruitment of children and young people into organised crime is not only vital for dismantling criminal networks but also fundamental to safeguarding the future and well-being of children.

1. What specific measures is the Commission implementing to prevent the recruitment of children and young people into organised crime? Is there any action plan on the agenda?

2. Will the Commission ensure that digital platforms are obliged to take action against the recruitment of children and young people on their platforms?

3. Will the Commission hold digital platforms accountable if they fail to comply with such obligations? If so, how?

Submitted: 5.2.2025

Answer given by Mr Brunner on behalf of the European Commission
(10 April 2025)

1. The Commission stepped up actions on crime prevention through the 'EU Roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime' ([1]) and is engaging with stakeholders to strengthen cooperation among competent authorities and with Internet companies through the EU Internet Forum ([2]). The Commission presented the ProtectEU Internal Security Strategy on 1 April 2025 ([3]) and announced that it will develop an Action Plan on the Protection of Children against Crime, encompassing the online and offline dimensions. In addition, the Commission adopted the 'BIK+ Strategy' ([4]) to protect and empower children and young people online, designed 'A comprehensive approach to mental health' ([5]) and will carry out an EU-wide inquiry on the impacts of social media on mental health and wellbeing, focusing on young people.

2. Under the Digital Services Act (DSA), online service providers must take appropriate measures to ensure a high level of privacy, safety and security for minors ([6]), and the Commission is preparing Guidelines. Providers of very large online platforms (VLOPs) and search engines (VLOSEs) must assess the risks that the design and functioning of their services may have on minors, adopt proportionate and effective risk mitigation measures, and submit a risk assessment report yearly.

3. The Commission has opened formal proceedings to assess whether TikTok, Facebook and Instagram may have breached the DSA in areas related to the protection of minors. The Commission is continuously monitoring compliance of VLOPs and VLOSEs with their obligations under the DSA and remains ready to open additional formal investigations when needed.

([1]) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the EU roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime, Brussels, 18.10.2023 COM(2023) 641 final.

([2]) EU Internet Forum Senior Officials Meeting 'Tackling online harms', 12 December 2024, 14:00 — 17:30, Brussels and online, and EU Internet Forum Technical Meeting 'Preventing the online recruitment of minors by criminal networks', 5 March 2025, 10:30 — 12:30, online. For further information, see https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-union-Internet-forum

([3]) https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-presents-protecteu-internal-security-strategy-2025-04-01_en

([4]) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on A Digital Decade for children and youth: the new European strategy for a better Internet for kids (BIK+), Brussels, 11.5.2022, COM(2022) 212 final.

([5]) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a comprehensive approach to mental health, Brussels, 7.6.2023 COM(2023) 298 final. For further information, see also https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/european-health-union/comprehensive-approach-mental-health_en; https://health.ec.europa.eu/document/download/6317c605-5f5d-4d4f-9c8a-d5c93e869814_en?filename=ncd_tracking-framework-mh_en.pdf

([6]) 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).