

The Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

22 August 2025

Re: Omission of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse from Government VAWG Strategy

Dear Home Secretary,

We are writing to you as 10 child rights organisations to raise our concern at recent reports¹ which state that Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA) is to be omitted from the scope of the Government's upcoming Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy.

Violence against girls is inseparable from violence against women. VAWG and child sexual abuse are inherently and deeply connected— with shared root causes like gender inequality, misogyny and power imbalances making a co-ordinated and joined-up response essential.

Children are also disproportionately likely to be victims. Each year, around 500,000 children in England and Wales will experience some form of sexual abuse, and children account for 40% of all victims of sexual offences, despite making up just 20% of the population.² This is a worldwide threat, with children overwhelmingly bearing the brunt of sexual violence and abuse both off and on line. Victims of child sexual abuse are also more likely to be victims of adult sexual violence and domestic abuse.³ The Government cannot therefore truly tackle violence against women and girls without tackling the sexual abuse of children.

The internet can be the front line where girls bear the brunt of this form of abuse and often the lines between on and offline harms are increasingly blurred. In 2024, 97% (278,492) of the reports of child sexual abuse imagery confirmed by the Internet Watch Foundation showed the sexual abuse of only girls, an increase of 14,246 reports since 2023.⁴ Moreover, 98% (6,945) of actioned images and videos of AI-generated child sexual abuse material contained imagery of girls and a 2025 report from NSPCC also found that four in five victims of online grooming cases are girls.⁵ As Baroness Casey's report concluded, if the grooming scandal took place now, it would begin online. Her report is also a stark reminder of just how prevalent the abuse of girls still is, and how much work is needed to address it.

We also know that girls are already forced to shrink both their physical and digital lives to stay safe – a modern echo of the age-old reality where their freedom is curtailed to avoid violence.

¹ Shock and anger as child sexual exploitation victims 'not in scope' of violence against women and girls strategy | UK News | Sky News

² <https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-resources/research-evidence/scale-nature-of-abuse/>

³ <https://bmcmmedicine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12916-020-01788-3>

⁴ <https://www.iwf.org.uk/annual-data-insights-report-2024/data-and-insights/analysis-by-sex/>

⁵ <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2025/targeting-girls-online>

A recent report on nudification tools by the Children's Commissioner for England reported instances of girls explicitly reducing their online presence to keep themselves safe online.⁶ The Commissioner noted that 'this pattern of behaviour is similar to girls avoiding walking home alone at night, or not going to certain public places alone'. Even at home, we know that too many children, particularly girls, face danger from those who should keep them safe.⁷

As this evidence shows, CSEA is a pervasive form of harm that can reach into numerous different areas of children's lives, from the online world to their own homes and communities. Any serious strategy to address this endemic issue needs to tackle this form of abuse - both on and offline - head on.

It is vital the forthcoming Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy includes clear and deliverable objectives to combat child sexual exploitation and abuse. This is critical following the powerful and shocking findings of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, Baroness Casey's Audit of Group Based Child Sexual Exploitation, and the National Child Safeguarding Review Panel's review of the response to child sexual abuse in the family environment.

We all stand ready to help with this essential work and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,

Kerry Smith, CEO, Internet Watch Foundation

Chris Sherwood, CEO, NSPCC

Ian Dean, Director, Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse

Will Gardner, CEO, Childnet

Carolyn Bunting MBE, Joint-CEO, Internet Matters

Kate Wareham, Strategic Director Young People, Families and Communities, Catch22

Lynn Perry, CEO, Barnardo's

Deborah Denis, CEO, Lucy Faithfull Foundation

David Wright CBE, Director UK Safer Internet Centre

Mark Russell, CEO, The Children's Society

⁶ <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/children-nudification-tools-and-sexually-explicit-deepfakes/>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-review-into-child-sexual-abuse-within-the-family-environment>