

02.4 Helpline Observatory report

January-March 2026

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Introduction

27 helplines from 26 countries submitted data for the reporting period 1 January – 31 March 2026.¹

	Country	Helpline service(s)
1.	Albania	CRCA
2.	Belgium	Child Focus
3.	Bulgaria	National Child Online Safety Helpline
4.	Croatia	Helpline Croatia
5.	Cyprus	Helpline 1480
6.	Czech Republic	Linka bezpečí
7.	Denmark	Red Barnet
8.	Estonia	Child Helpline Service
9.	Finland	Nuortennett
10.	France	3018
11.	Germany	Nummer gegen Kummer e.V.
12.	Greece	Help-Line.GR
13.	Ireland	Childline

¹ All graphs are based on data collected on the Insafe-INHOPE Assessment Platform. Every three months, Insafe helplines report figures on the number of counselling services per topic, channel, gender, target group and platform where the issue occurred. They also provide qualitative information on helpline cases and emerging issues and trends. This report is for internal Insafe network purposes only.

		NPC
14.	Italy	Telefono Azzurro
15.	Lithuania	Child Line
16.	Luxembourg	BEE SECURE
17.	Malta	Support line 179
18.	Netherlands	Offlimits
19.	North Macedonia	MKSafeNet
20.	Norway	Norwegian Red Cross
21.	Poland	Empowering Children Foundation
22.	Portugal	Linha Internet Segura
23.	Romania	ctrl_AJUTOR
24.	Slovenia	Tom telefon helpline
25.	Spain	Telefono 017
26.	Sweden	Bris

Helplines log all contacts against a set of categories (see [Annex 1](#)) which have been pre-defined following extensive consultation with the network. The categories are updated periodically to take account of new and emerging online concerns; the most recent update occurred in April 2023.

This report looks in detail at the data submitted for quarter 1 of 2026 (January-March) and also includes insights from helpline and awareness early warning meetings. These meetings take place every six weeks respectively and provide a forum for helplines and awareness centres to share information about possible emerging trends, concerns related to apps or websites, or any other information

that SICs are seeing which might be of use to the wider network. Some helplines have been unable to submit data for this reporting period likely as a result of not being currently funded (please see full list of those that submitted listed above).

Executive summary

Helplines received over 17,000 contacts during this reporting period which represented an increase when compared with Q4. Given the fact that some helplines were unable to submit data this suggests that there has been a significant increase in contacts overall. The majority of contacts are received from 14–18-year-olds (41 per cent) with parents and teachers accounting for over a third of those making contact. Two-thirds of contacts came from those identifying as female. Once again, the most common reason for reaching out to a helpline was cyberbullying with just under 13 per cent of contacts about this. Sextortion continues to be highlighted by counsellors as a challenge for children and young people and AI appears to be increasingly used in these cases.

Helpline contacts

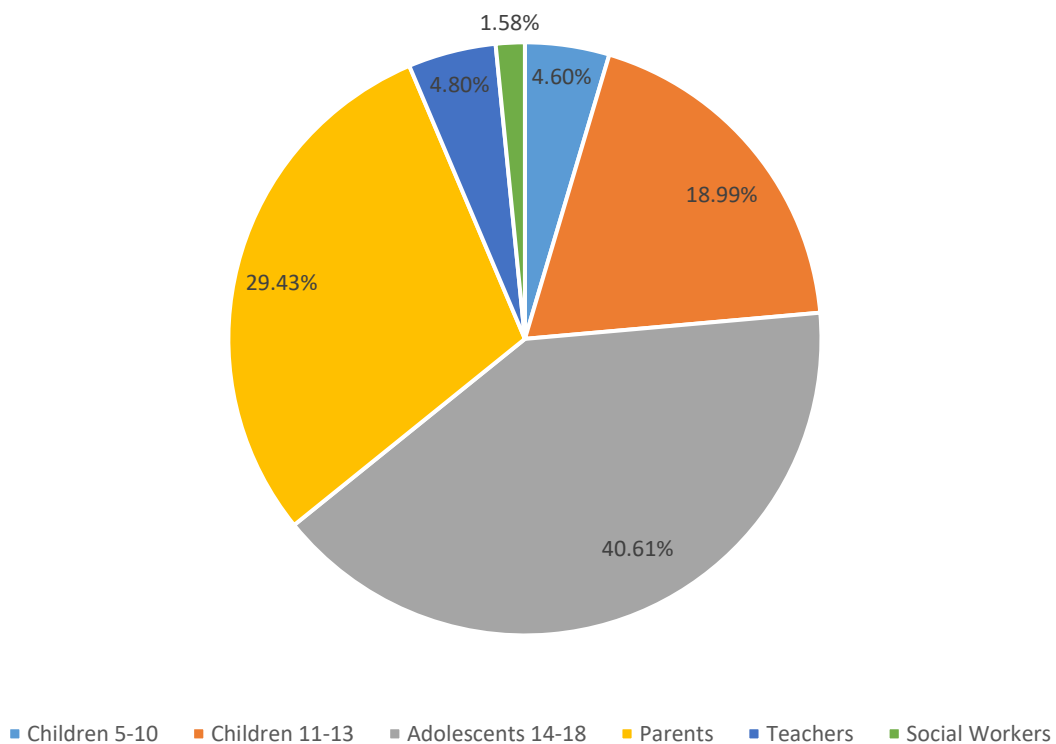
There were 17,103 contacts made to Insafe helplines during the reporting period (1 January to 31 March 2026). This represents an increase of 14 per cent when compared to the previous reporting period despite the fact that less helplines have submitted data.

53 per cent of callers identified as female with 28 per cent as male and the remaining 19 per cent where gender was not specified.

Around 60 per cent of the contacts came from 11-18-year-olds with a further 5 per cent from the youngest children, aged between 5 and 10 years old. This clearly reflects the challenges that this group faces and perhaps the increasing amount of time that they are spending online.

29 per cent of contacts came from parents during this reporting period. This represents an increase of 12 percentage points since Q4 of 2025. Almost 5 per cent of contacts were from teachers and around 1.5 per cent from social workers.

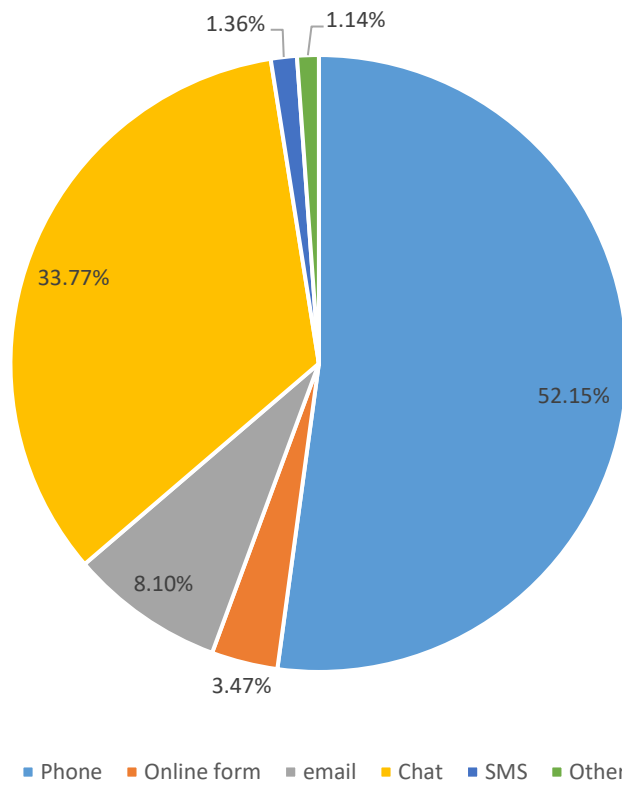
Who contacted helplines Jan-Mar 2026



How helplines are contacted

Over half of the contacts received from helplines (52 per cent) were made by telephone with another third (34 per cent) using chat facilities. Helplines also respond to contacts via email (8 per cent) and online forms (3 per cent). Several helplines have noted that messages that are submitted online (forms, email, chat) have often been written with the help and support of AI. This can pose some difficulties for counsellors when they respond as it is no longer possible to determine the age of the caller based on their writing style, word choices etc. which means it is hard to know what sort of tone to use in the response.

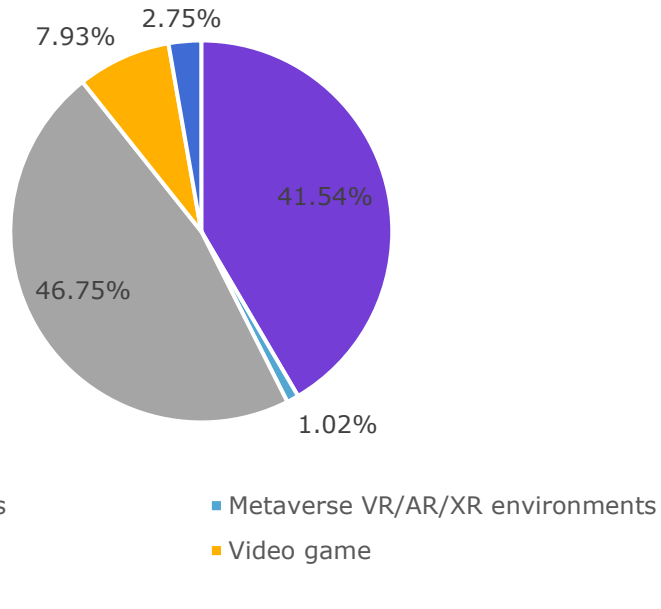
How helplines were contacted Jan-Mar 2026



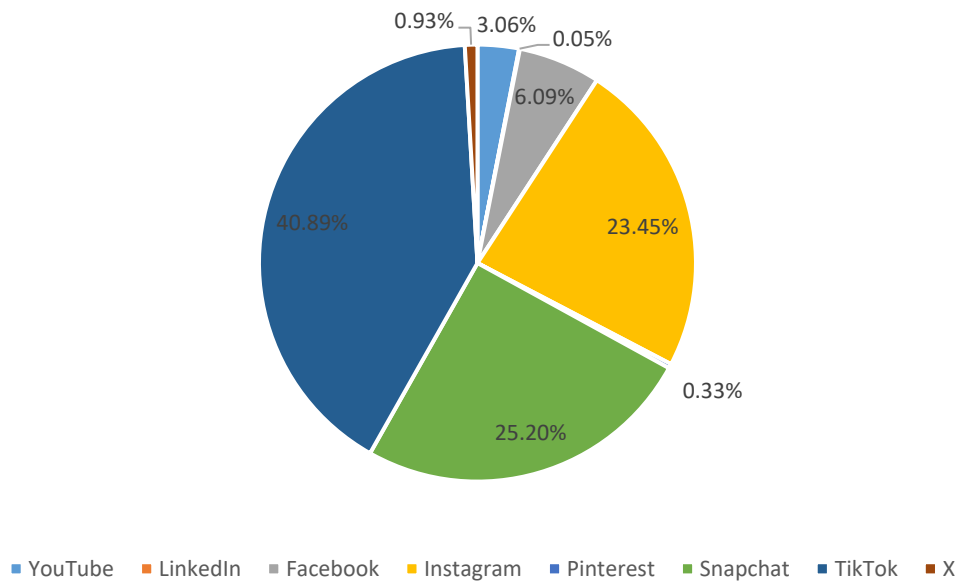
Where did the harm or potential harm occur?

Where possible, helplines are asked to log the platform(s) on which a particular harm took place. Around half of the helplines that submitted data during this reporting period were able to do this (14 currently). The two graphs below first show the type of platform where issues took place, followed by a more detailed breakdown of the individual social media platforms. Problems tend to occur on messaging platforms (41.54 per cent) and social media sites (46.75 per cent) whilst almost 8 per cent took place within video game environments.

Where potential harm occurred to those contacting Insafe helplines Jan-Mar 2026



Social media platforms where problems occurred Jan-Mar 2026

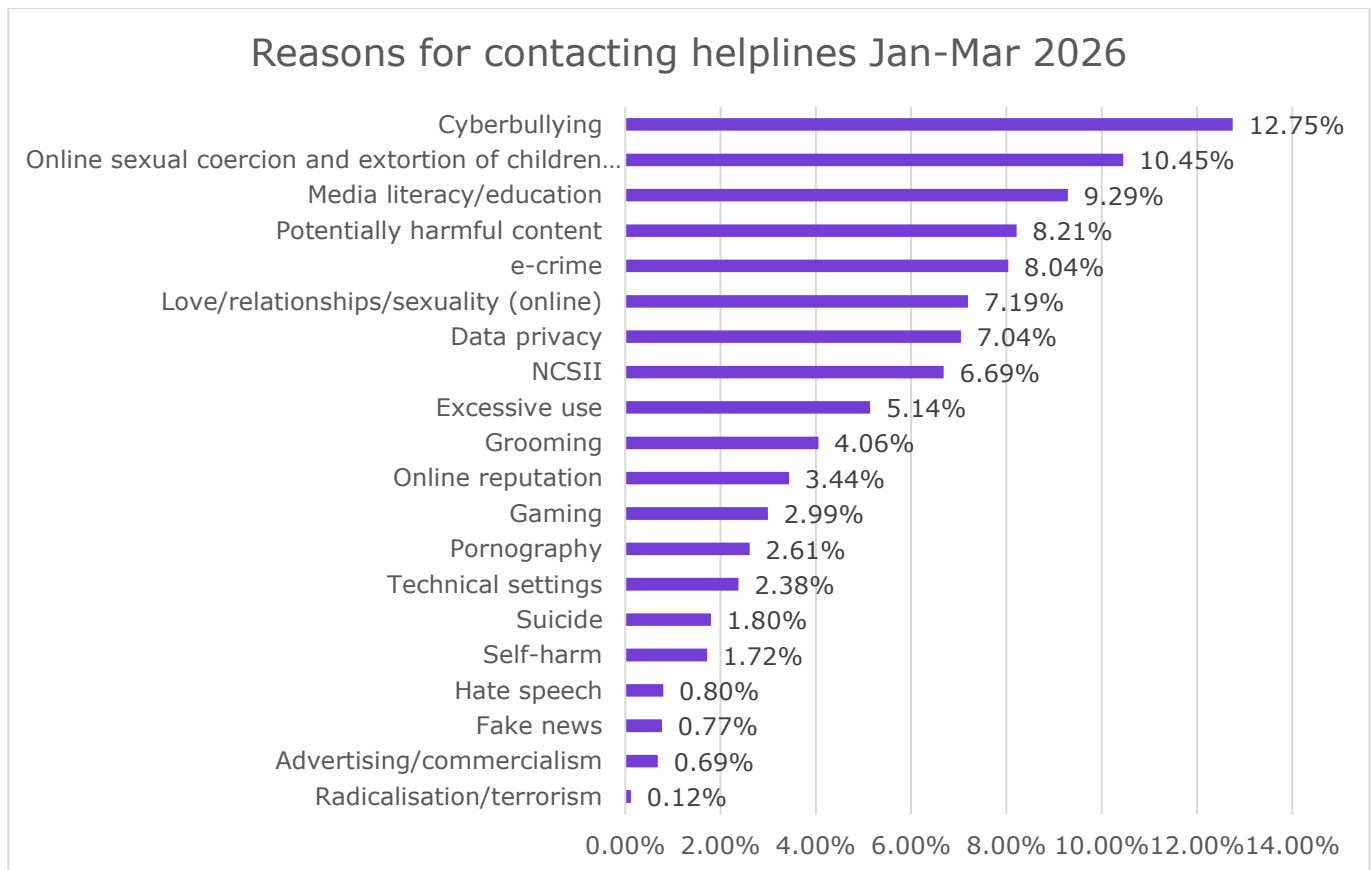


When helplines were able to identify a specific social media platform (there were 3,695 cases during this reporting period), the majority (41 per cent) took place on TikTok with a further 25 per cent on Snapchat and 23 per cent on Instagram. This is not surprising perhaps given that these three platforms are most popular with children and young people.

There were 37 contacts that related to issues with adult platforms, with 89 per cent of these taking place on Pornhub.

Why are helplines contacted?

The table below shows the reasons why people contacted helplines between January and March 2026. Helplines categorise contacts against a list of categories that came into effect on 1 April 2023. The full set of categories and their definitions can be found in [Annex 1](#).



Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is the most common reason for someone to contact a helpline. There was a reduction of one percentage point when compared to the previous reporting period, however, there has been a 75 per cent increase in the **number** of contacts related to cyberbullying since Q4 of 2025.

The European Commission has published the [action plan against cyberbullying](#) in February 2026 which highlights the importance of reporting and the need for victims of cyberbullying to have clear, trusted and accessible channels to report abuse and obtain help. The helplines clearly provide this service.

One helpline explained that cyberbullying is the most prominent issue for them to deal with and noted that most cases are found on TikTok and often involve the creation of fake or anonymous profiles to target individuals (and sometimes their families) over extended periods of time. Another helpline found that cyberbullying was often happening after face-to-face bullying had taken place in school. +

Online sexual coercion and exploitation of children (sextortion)

Sextortion accounted for over 10 per cent of all contacts during this reporting period and almost 1,600 cases were dealt with. In addition, 7 per cent of contacts related to the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. Victims talk about extreme embarrassment and humiliation in these cases and often find it very difficult to seek help, quite often in cases of sextortion they have already paid some money to the perpetrators before contacting a helpline. AI continues to feature in increasing numbers of sextortion cases with nudifying apps and tools becoming easier to use and available in greater numbers. Although some countries are making these illegal, they are still easy to access. The Dutch helpline also spoke about cases where AI had been used to create images of young people engaging in certain acts (not nude images). The images were then used to blackmail the individual.

Potentially harmful content

There was a rise of three percentage points in cases that were categorised as relating to potentially harmful content when compared to the previous reporting period (increasing from five percent to eight percent). Potentially harmful content is defined as a range of issues that can include online prostitution, drugs, eating disorders etc. Some helplines have reported receiving cases that they believe are related to the Com network where victims are coerced into acts of self-harm, criminal damage or cruelty to siblings or family pets which they are expected to document and upload as proof. The recent Insafe/INHOPE joint training meeting that took place in Latvia in April has sessions which focused on the Com network and considered how helplines and safer internet centres should respond as well as the potential impact on counsellors.

The table below shows the percentage of calls received by helplines against different categories over the past two years.

	Apr- Jun '24	Jul- Sep '24	Oct – Dec '24	Jan – Mar '25	Apr- Jun '25	Jul- Sep '25	Oct- Dec '25	Jan- Mar '26
Advertising/ commercialism	1	1	1	0	0	0	0*	1
Cyberbullying	14	12	15	17	17	15	14	13
Data privacy	5	6	6	7	8	6	7	7
e-crime	10	12	8	9	10	10	9	8
Excessive use	4	4	5	5	4	4	5	5
Fake news	1	1	1	1	1	1	0**	1
Gaming	4	3	4	4	4	3	4	3
Grooming	2	2	2	3	3	4	3	4
Hate speech	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1

Love, relationships, sex	9	8	7	8	8	8	8	7
Media literacy/ education	8	7	10	9	7	7	7	9
NCSII (sexting until Apr 23)	5	7	6	5	6	6	6	7
Online reputation	4	4	5	4	4	3	4	3
OSCEC (sextortion until Apr 23)	8	9	7	9	8	9	9	10
Pornography	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	3
Potentially harmful content	7	8	7	6	6	5	5	8
Radicalisation/ terrorism	0	0	0	1	0	0	0***	0*
Self-harm	5	5	5	3	3	3	2	2
Suicide	5	4	4	3	3	4	5	2
Technical settings	4	4	2	3	2	3	4	2

*0.12 per cent of contacts

Other points to note and possible questions to consider

- AI continues to feature in helpline cases. Counsellors have explained that some children and young people are asking AI to help them to construct their emails/messages asking for help that they then submit to the helpline. In some cases, helplines have reported receiving emails with incomprehensible text which they believe has been generated using AI voice-to-text tools.
- AI companions and chatbots are being used by increasing numbers of young people as evidenced in the [EU Kids Online research](#) published in February which found that 72 per cent of 9–16-year-olds engage in some type of GenAI activity. Some callers have explained that they are in love with an AI chatbot. In one case a caller had talked about how their AI companion would tell them what to make for lunch and which clothes to wear.
- AI appears to also be used in scams and phishing attempts which is making these cases more complex and sophisticated.
- Sextortion remains a key issue that helplines are dealing with. Numbers continue to increase with one helpline noting that their caseload has doubled when compared to last year. Overall

DSA support actions

SICs continue to raise awareness of the DSA (Digital Services Act) and explain what it means for children, young people and their parents, caregivers and educators. The following examples illustrate these activities, and [additional information can be found here](#) as well as in the DSA annual report.

Digital Services Coordinators

As Digital Services Coordinators (DSCs) become established in different Member States, Safer Internet Centres are developing strong relationships with them. Most SICs have a good relationship with their DSC and many are collaborating on awareness raising campaigns, with DSCs taking an active role in Safer Internet Day events and celebrations in their country. A good example was the SID event in Belgium. The DSC from Finland spoke at a recent meeting of the Nordic SICs.

Research

The Finnish SIC conducted a survey on young people's media usage. This was done with six graders and included some information about the DSA. It asked young people about things they have seen and reported on social media platforms. The [report can be found here](#).

The SIC in Slovenia published some research in April 2026 (*Risky use of digital technology among young people in Slovenia*). The main report focuses on the use of social media by 12–20-year-olds and highlights the risks they are facing, as well as information about dark patterns and the reporting of inappropriate content.

A wider survey aimed at parents is being developed and some questions will include topics related to the DSA. The survey will be carried out in May/June 2026.

Awareness raising

Many SICs are including references to the DSA in awareness campaigns with some integrating information into resources for schools and parents. There is an [Online](#)

Safety Framework in Ireland; the SIC was involved in the development of **new educational materials for schools** about young people's rights under this framework, including the DSA.

The Latvian SIC has published **two guides for parents**. One focuses on the teen accounts that have been made available by many VLOPs and the other on **parental controls** more broadly. The guides highlight many of the key safety measures that have been adopted by the VLOPs as a result of the DSA.

Presentations that are used in schools with pupils, parents and teachers have also been updated to include relevant information about the DSA.

The SIC in Luxembourg incorporates DSA references into various training modules in order to raise awareness of its existence among young people. For example, the DSA is mentioned in the **Hype im Netz** training for 7th and 8th grade, particularly in relation to pornography.

Youth involvement

SICs are increasingly involving their youth panels in work they are doing about the DSA with several sharing their views at national events. Youth panellists are also creating content about the DSA to share with other young people.

Trusted flaggers

A number of Insafe helplines have applied to become trusted flaggers under the DSA, and several have been officially appointed. Helplines are now also asked to share information on the number of reports they have made as a trusted flagger, and this is reflected in the table below:

Country	Organisation	Area of expertise	Number of notices submitted during Q1

Austria	Rat auf Draht gemeinnützige GmbH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of minors • Rights of the child 	No data submitted due to lack of current funding
Belgium	Child Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyber violence • Protection of minors violations 	0
Denmark	Red Barnet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyber violence • Data protection and privacy violations • Illegal speech • Protection of minors violations • Scams and fraud • Violence 	136
France	e-Enfance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyber violence • Data protection and privacy violations • Illegal products • Illegal speech 	1,858

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of minors violations • Risk for public security • Scams and frauds and violence 	
Italy	Telefono Azzurro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data protection and privacy violations • Cyber violence • Incitement to self harm • Protection of minors violations • Violence 	311
Latvia	Dross Internets.LV		No data submitted due to lack of current funding
Lithuania	Vaikų linija	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyber violence • Protection of minors violations 	

Luxembourg	BEE SECURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data protection and privacy violations • Illegal speech • Protection of minors violations • Risks for public security 	5
Malta	Foundation for Social Welfare Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of minors violations 	
Netherlands	Stichting Offlimits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of minors violations • Cyber violence • Scams and fraud 	12

The EC’s full list of trusted flaggers under the Digital Services Act is available [here](#).

Annex 1: Category definitions from 1 April 2023

Category	Definition
Advertising/commercialism	Misleading policies, terms and conditions, fake advertising.
Cyberbullying	Bullying usually involves a child being picked on, ridiculed and intimidated by another child, other children or adults using online technologies. Bullying may involve psychological violence. Cyberbullying can be intentional and unintentional.
Data privacy	Issues related to the abuse of personal or private information, as well as how to protect privacy and how to react when something has gone wrong.
e-crime	Chain emails, phishing sites. Identity theft, fraud, data theft, copyright infringement, hacking, piracy, etc. This may include referrals to a hotline.
Excessive use	Calls related to the amount of time spent on media – related to the loss of control over internet or online use as compared to other (offline) activities.
Fake news	False or misleading information which is presented as factual – either unintentionally (misinformation) or intentionally (disinformation).

Gaming	For any issues related to gaming content (e.g. pay to win, lootboxes). Please note that addiction should be logged under excessive use.
Grooming	Actions deliberately undertaken (sometimes, but not always over a longer period of time) by an adult or stranger with the aim of befriending and establishing an emotional connection with a child, in order to lower the child's inhibitions in preparation for sexual activity with the child.
Hate speech	Discrimination or prejudice against others on account of their race, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability or gender – this could include racist materials online or racist comments which have been made by a group or individual.
Love/relationships/sexuality (online)	Questions relating to online love, relationships, dating sites etc. This category includes consensual sexting.
Media literacy education	Callers asking for information relating to a better understanding of the internet, online services and how they can be used.
NCSII	The non-consensual sending or receiving of sexual images and/or texts via mobile and other devices (including appearing in such images) amongst peers. This includes cyberflashing. Consensual sexting should be recorded under the category love/relationships/sexuality (online).

Online reputation	Concerns about damage to reputation online (this may include requests for information on how to protect online reputation).
Online sexual coercion and extortion of children (formerly referred to as sextortion)	A means of coercing cybercrime victims to perform sexual favours or to pay a hefty sum in exchange for the non-exposure of their explicit images, videos or conversations.
Pornography	Online content with no artistic value that describes or shows sexual acts or naked people in a way that is intended to be sexually exciting.
Potentially harmful content	Including online prostitution, drugs, eating disorders, etc. Any issues not covered by other categories.
Radicalisation/terrorism	The unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims. This includes grooming for violent extremism.
Self-harm	The non-suicidal injuring of one’s body.
Suicide	Including calls related to sites promoting suicide and explaining ways to commit suicide, and/or suicidal thoughts or behaviour which is the result of online abuse.
Technical settings	Where a caller needs help to alter settings - Filtering & parental controls, Anti-virus, Spam, etc. Including security maintenance (for a device) (e.g. firewall, updates, popups, cookies).

 better-internet-for-kids.europa.eu

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