



## Technological Tipping Point Reached in Fight Against Child Sexual Abuse

The Virtual Global Taskforce<sup>1</sup> believes we have reached a significant **technological tipping point** with the roll out of End-to-End Encryption (E2EE) and the rapid evolution of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The confluence of these developments significantly alters the online landscape and make the law enforcement response to tackling online child sexual abuse (CSA) increasingly complex.

The last decade has already seen increasing growth in CSA, both contact offending and online. Most recently, global law enforcement have seen rapid increases in financial 'sextortion' crimes<sup>2</sup> which have grave repercussions, including tragically, suicide. Regrettably, these technological developments promise a significant worsening of these trends in the future.

Following Meta's recent introduction of E2EE by default on Facebook Messenger,<sup>3</sup> we wish to reiterate our April 2023 statement<sup>4</sup> around the implications of this technology on victims of CSA and on law enforcement's ability to identify offenders and safeguard victims. In our view, industry carry a crucial responsibility to ensure their services are safe for users and for society. VGT members are deeply concerned around intentional design choices that degrade safety systems and weaken the collective capability of law enforcement and our partners to protect children online.

The rapid development of generative AI tools is exacerbating risks to children which are already rising due to greater deployment of E2EE. At our recent meeting, the VGT heard that **children are already being put at increased risk** due to AI intensifying offending and extending the time and resources required by law enforcement to identify and prosecute offenders and safeguard children. This trend is set to worsen.



We should expect that some offenders will use AI tools to groom children at scale, accelerating the process by automating engagement with concerning ease. In addition, AI imagery tools can generate vast volumes of illegal material in seconds, including both completely synthetic imagery and those which include real children. This will impact the detection and prioritisation of cases, where it will become increasingly difficult to identify whether or not there is a real child in danger.

AI-generated child sexual abuse material (CSAM) also plays a significant role in the **normalisation of offending behaviour**. There is increasing evidence showing a strong correlation<sup>5</sup> between viewing CSAM online and seeking direct contact with children. The ease and availability of AI-generated CSAM will only escalate this further and create a more permissive environment for perpetrators, putting increased children at risk.

The VGT believes the substantial wide-ranging harm to victims from the creation, or even the threat of creation, of AI-generated CSAM must be recognised. Its **creation, possession, and distribution is not only gravely harmful but also illegal** in most jurisdictions. Those who create, share or access CSAM, whether AI-generated or not, can expect to be investigated and pursued by law enforcement. The VGT is committed to further strengthening global regulatory systems and ensuring legislation approaches take into consideration the serious harms this threat poses.

AI technology also offers significant opportunities and capabilities in tackling CSA. We are committed to continuing to work with industry and other partners to use the technology to strengthen our collective response to the CSA threat. Industry and law enforcement collaboration in the legitimate and ethical use of technology is now more important than ever, and we will proactively seek to ensure that **technology is used to protect against online CSA rather than enabling it**.



# Virtual Global Taskforce

The VGT pledges to support global responses by strengthening:

- **International law enforcement cooperation** - we will continue to share information and operational capabilities that are enhanced by AI and use our unique perspectives and expertise to inform legislative change and strengthen regulatory approaches.
- **Industry engagement** - the VGT appreciates and values the engagement and continued collaboration of industry and relevant organisations in joining forces to get ahead of this evolving threat. We will work collaboratively with industry to continue to develop our understanding of how AI tools will impact the CSA threat - both positively and negatively - and identify how tools can be used responsibly and ethically to combat CSA.
- **Prevention** - the VGT will use its global platform and collective influence to ensure we are united in supporting children, caregivers and education professionals to better understand the threat generative AI poses and provide advice and support to our global communities.



**Footnotes:**

1. VGT law enforcement members include UK National Crime Agency, Australian Federal Police, New Zealand Police, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, US Homeland Security, US Federal Bureau of Investigations, Interpol, Europol, Kenyan National Police, United Arab Emirates Ministry of Interior, Dutch National Police, Philippines National Police, Philippines National Bureau of Investigations, Columbian National Police.
2. <https://www.accce.gov.au/news-and-media/media-release/afp-joins-international-law-enforcement-agencies-deliver-joint-warning-about-global-financial-sextortion>
3. <https://about.fb.com/news/2023/12/default-end-to-end-encryption-on-messenger/>
4. [Virtual Global Taskforce E2EE Statement April 2023](#)
5. [ReDirection Survey Report.pdf](#)