

Five Countries and tech firms agree groundbreaking principles to keep children safe online

At an event at the U.S. Department of Justice, the [Voluntary Principles to Counter Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) were formally launched. They are a set of 11 actions tech firms should take to ensure children are not sexually exploited on their platforms.

These range from pledges to stop existing and new child sexual abuse material appearing on platforms, taking steps to stop the livestreaming of abuse, identify and stop grooming and predatory behaviour, and ensuring they are ahead of the evolving threat.

In July the Five Country Ministerial – made up of the governments of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the USA – agreed to draft the principles, given the global nature of child sexual abuse. They were written in consultation with technology industry representatives.

Among the companies to endorse the principles were Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Twitter, Snap and Roblox. At a roundtable discussion in Washington, attendees from the Five Countries, including Security Minister James Brokenshire and industry, discussed the voluntary principles and the best way to ensure tech companies action them.

Home Secretary Priti Patel, said:

It is truly horrific that thousands of sick paedophiles are preying on vulnerable children from across the world. This scandal requires our global partners to work together, and these principles provide a blueprint for delivering just that.

I want this landmark collaboration across borders and sectors to define a stronger, new, united approach.

The launch of the principles comes against the backdrop of more criminals from across the world using evolving tactics to target children online.

Last year, the tech industry reported 69 million child sexual abuse images and videos – up by over 50% in just 12 months. According to the National Strategic Assessment more than 3.5 million accounts are now registered to the world's most depraved dark web sites. In coordinated operational activity against online child sexual exploitation and abuse, the National Crime Agency and UK police arrest around 500 child sex offenders a month and safeguard about 700 children a month.

As part of the launch, the security minister also met the Phoenix 11 – a

group of Canadian survivors of child sexual abuse.

In collaboration with industry and other stakeholders, the 11 principles are split into six different categories:

- preventing child sexual abuse material from appearing
- target online grooming and predatory behaviour
- target livestreaming
- a specialised approach for children
- victim/survivor considerations collaborate and respond to evolving threat
- search

The WePROTECT Global Alliance, which currently comprises of 97 governments, 25 technology companies and 30 civil society organisations, will promote the principles across industry and encourage support for the initiative. This wide support will help ensure the principles are taken forward by the technology industry.

Security Minister James Brokenshire said:

We cannot allow children to fall victim to predators who lurk in the shadows of the web.

Through global collaboration and with enhanced action from the Five Countries, law enforcement agencies and tech companies, we will ensure that children are protected online.

The voluntary principles are just one way the UK government is taking world-leading action to tackle online child sexual abuse.

Soon, the government will launch a first-of-its-kind Child Sexual Abuse Strategy, which will set out an ambitious range of cross-government activity to bear down on offenders, safeguard children and support victims. Recently, the government also announced £30m extra funding for law enforcement to help them tackle online CSEA.

Further measures have included:

- the UK government co-hosted a summit in December where 93 countries convened to drive a global response to this global crime
- the development of Project Artemis by Microsoft and other companies following a Hackathon co-hosted by the Home Office and Microsoft, which will use artificial intelligence to identify and block child grooming conversations
- upgrades to the ground-breaking Child Abuse Image Database will allow law enforcement to speed up investigations and safeguard more children
- progressing Online Harms Legislation, which will place a statutory duty of care on tech companies to keep their users safe online, overseen by an independent regulator

As part of his visit to Washington, the security minister also attended the Transatlantic Aviation Industry Roundtable, to discuss further collaboration on aviation security solutions.