



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on March 11, 2023

## European Youth Resist Mass Surveillance Intended to “Protect Minors”

Two-thirds of European teenagers oppose the European Commission’s proposed child-protection law that would mandate internet providers to monitor personal messages, according to a recent [Episto poll](#) published on March 7.

The Child Sexual Abuse Regulation (CSAR), also called “[Chat Control](#),” was put forth by the Commission last year in an attempt to curtail the spread of child pornography through messaging services using end-to-end encryption. Although the legislative process has been underway, public discussion about it has been close to none.



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If the European Parliament authorizes this regulation later this year, all digital correspondence of European citizens would effectively be automatically tracked and scanned for keywords and pictures suspected of being child pornography. Next, these messages would be flagged and sent to a central database for more investigations and even prosecution.

The Commission hopes to mandate this regulation for all email and messaging apps presently in use, even encompassing those with more advanced end-to-end encryption, such as WhatsApp, Signal, or Telegram. Critics state that Chat Control would effectively mean “the end of privacy of digital correspondence” in the EU.

Thus far, Europeans do not appear to back this proposed regulation. A 2021 [consultation](#) organized on behalf of the Commission indicated that the majority of both citizens and relevant NGOs objected to mandating Chat Control in Europe, while more than 80 percent of EU citizens protested against applying it to encrypted communication services.

The most recent poll assessed support behind the idea among EU children themselves. Members of the [European Pirate Party](#) and the [European Digital Rights](#) (EDRi) association commissioned the survey and asked 8,000 European teenagers aged 13 to 17, in 13 EU member states, if they were in favor of the legislation. More than 66 percent of respondents explicitly opposed the proposed scanning of personal messaging. Besides, more than 80 percent of the minors said they would feel uneasy being politically active or exploring their sexuality if they knew their messages were tracked.

Survey results revealed that 56 percent of minors objected to this regulation, with 68 percent of children stating that it was key that they liaise with adults. To boot, 85 percent of underage respondents say they would probably or definitely find an adult to register apps if they had to go around age limitations.

Rather than introduce the new regulation, 37 percent of respondents suggested enhancing the mechanisms for young people to flag cases of grooming and guaranteeing that they are sufficiently and effectively addressed. Also, 43 percent of children stated that enhancing media literacy and training



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minors on risks and appropriate responses would be the most effective way to protect them from harm on the internet.

The breach of basic privacy is only one of the many issues broached by critics of the regulation. Under Chat Control, there would be an increased risk of people being falsely reported and investigated for sexual abuse. This is because algorithms and machine-generated reports could identify legal material such as vacation photos. Based on some [Irish](#) reports, some 80 percent of all machine-generated reports have been found to be unhelpful in terms of combating crime. A second [report](#), disclosed by German authorities, disclosed that 40 percent of criminal investigations started for child pornography ultimately proved to be targeting minors.

Another bone of contention with regard to Chat Control would be that garnering the personal data of all EU citizens would increase their vulnerability to being targets of rogue actors, such as hackers or outside governments. Should EU citizens travel abroad, their messages have to go through the local communication service providers to reach the central database. It would be a challenging task to always ensure that third-party countries would adhere to privacy laws.

Naysayers of Chat Control also added that the legislation would not even be a good solution to the problem it aims to target. NGOs and watchdogs against the law state that actual child-abuse material is seldom disseminated via applications such as those targeted by Chat Control. Rather, these materials are mainly spread on the dark web or using analog forms of communication.

Marcel Kolaja, member and quaestor of the European Parliament for the Czech Pirate Party and a member of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) and the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT), remarked:

The survey clearly shows that even the young people and children, who the legislation claims to protect, oppose the draft. Only about a third of European minors think that blocking underage people from installing communication apps would help to fight child sexual abuse and grooming. The Commission's draft aims to protect children from sexual predators. However, in its current form, it merely bans them from using an important communication tool and subjects them to mass surveillance. All this in spite of their will. Obviously, it's important to protect children from sexual predators. However, the Commission's draft is both ineffective and infringes upon their basic human right to privacy. Instead, we need to focus on educating young people on the risks of communicating with strangers online and improving the mechanisms for young people to report cases of grooming.

Moreover, Patrick Breyer, member of the European Parliament for the German Pirate Party and Greens/EFA shadow rapporteur for the CSA Regulation proposal in the Civil Liberties Committee (LIBE), echoed:

The best way to keep children safe online is to listen to them and to respect their views. Young persons prefer being trained in defending against online threats, rather than having their private chats and intimate photos scanned and exposed. Teens prefer effective reporting mechanisms to being patronized and prevented from communicating with adults altogether. Children are particularly vulnerable to violations of their privacy, anonymity and safety online. The EU's extreme CSAR Chat Control proposal frightens the very children in



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whose name it is being pushed through. Young persons deserve to be politically involved, not instrumentalized to establish a future of unprecedented mass surveillance.

In short, Chat Control would not make much progress in targeting the problem of child pornography. Instead, critics posit that it may even undermine efforts to target actually harmful material by flooding the database with wrongly flagged content. Furthermore, this regulation would undermine the privacy of all EU citizens, particularly parents and children, the very people whom the regulation purports to safeguard.

In a recent closed-door meeting with EU lawmakers, European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) Wojciech Wiewiórowski slammed this proposal as attempting to cover up violations of fundamental liberties. As the authority in charge of advising EU institutions on privacy matters, Wiewiórowski took an outspoken position opposing the draft law in a [joint opinion](#) with the European Data Protection Board. The proposal was decried as it included the possibility for judges to issue detection orders for interpersonal communication services.

In December, in a private discussion with the EU lawmakers, Wiewiórowski was much more blunt in his criticism of the proposal.

Wiewiórowski said this type of monitoring of private communications “will always be illegal under the Charter of Fundamental Rights (and probably under several national constitutional laws as well),” as a [written version](#) of the opening statement indicated.

Notwithstanding the numerous controversies surrounding its implementation, Chat Control remains on the globalist EU agenda, with the LIBE committee (on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs) discussing and amending it by the end of May, before presenting it for a vote in the plenary in October 2023.



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