

INHOPE POLICY STATEMENT

**For National Legislators, Policymakers, and
the European Commission**

**Protecting Safer Internet Centres:
The Case for Continued European
Commission Support and
National Investment in Critical
Child Protection Infrastructure**

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INHOPE

Protecting Safer Internet Centre Hotlines: The Case for Continued European Commission Support and National Investment in Critical Child Protection Infrastructure

About INHOPE

INHOPE is the International Association of Internet Hotlines, a global network of 57 hotlines in 52 countries working to combat online child sexual abuse material (CSAM). All our European members are integral parts of their national Safer Internet Centres (SICs), co-funded under the European Commission's (EC) Better Internet for Kids (BIK) program, itself the successor to the Safer Internet Program the Commission launched in 1999.

Over nearly three decades, European SICs have become a stalwart of European society, promoting digital literacy, online safety, and child protection in ways deeply embedded in national life. The model has proven so effective that it has been replicated in 14 countries outside Europe through the Safer Internet Centre Plus program, also funded by DG CONNECT under BIK. That is the legacy now at risk.

The Current Situation

A significant number of SICs, 14 in total (and 12 with active INHOPE hotlines), have been placed on the reserve list under the current EC co-funding round and are unlikely to receive the 50% co-funding applied for. For many SICs, EC funding is not supplementary, but foundational. Because the SIC model relies on co-financing, the absence of EU support also puts the remaining national funding at risk. As a result, several SICs may be forced to close.

SICs operate across four interdependent pillars: hotlines, helplines, awareness and education, and youth participation. These entities together make up the consortium that applies for the funding. The work of each of them is critical to European society and specifically to the online protection, safety and health of European citizens.

If hotline is removed, the operational heart of child protection is gone quite simply, and citizens will have no choice other than to be a silent bystander. If helpline is removed, children have nowhere to turn when they are desperate and in need of immediate support.

No reporting mechanism, no law enforcement referrals, no coordinated takedown. And without the awareness work that drives public reporting, the whole system is weakened.

The evidence is stark: in a country with a hotline, CSAM is removed in an average of 1.4 days. Without one, it takes 41 days. Europe is the highest hoster of CSAM in the world. These are not abstract figures.

A Responsibility, Not a Choice

Directive 2011/93/EU obliges Member States to ensure the prompt removal of child sexual abuse material online, while recognising the essential role of hotlines in this process. The EU has actively promoted hotlines as the mechanism for doing so in every Member State. The recast Directive 2011/93/EU, once in force, will establish Member State's duty of endeavour to provide stronger mandate for their national hotlines. Defunding the infrastructure that makes that obligation operable before the new legal framework is even in place would be a significant step in the wrong direction.

The Global Stakes: ICCAM and Revictimisation

ICCAM is INHOPE's technology platform, hosted by INTERPOL, through which hotlines exchange reports and coordinate the removal of CSAM with industry. Industry can include everyone from hosting providers, registrars and registries to social media platforms and internet service providers. Actionable intelligence is shared with international agencies including INTERPOL and with national law enforcement, enabling victim identification and the removal of children from harm as swiftly as possible, worldwide. In 2025 alone, the network exchanged 4,781,125 suspected CSAM records, a 450% increase from 2024, with 3.2 million confirmed as illegal.

The Numbers Tell the Story

The reserve list countries represent a critical concentration of this activity.

The 12 reserve countries with active hotlines submitted 149,186 reports in 2025, representing 11.10% of the global total, and hosted 739,192 CSAM URLs, representing 54.99% of the global total. This means that more than half of all CSAM hosting globally is located in countries that are about to lose their funding. Romania alone accounts for 40% of global hosting among reserve countries. Without intervention, 54% of CSAM hosting volume will not be actioned, and 11% of global CSAM reports to ICCAM will no longer be submitted to law enforcement for investigation and potentially removing a child from harm within hours.¹

¹ *These figures are based on normalised 2025 data, excluding Bulgaria as a statistical outlier whose reporting activity represented 72% of the original total.

Every hash in ICCAM is evidence matchable across borders. Every removal protects a child from re-victimisation. Every referral is a potential prosecution. The human rights consequences of losing this capacity extend far beyond Europe.

A Compounding Risk: The DSA Trusted Flagger Gap

The DSA introduces the Trusted Flagger mechanism to strengthen the detection and removal of illegal content online across the EU. Under Article 22, platforms must prioritise notices submitted by designated Trusted Flaggers. In practice, Safer Internet Centres and INHOPE hotlines already perform many of these functions by receiving public reports of suspected CSAM, analysing the content and submitting verified notices to platforms and law enforcement. However, the designation of Trusted Flaggers for CSAM remains uneven across Member States. Weakening SIC hotlines at this stage would therefore be short-sighted, as they already have the expertise and operational capacity to fulfil this role and support effective DSA implementation.

Without Trusted Flaggers in this field, CSAM reports to online platforms receive standard rather than priority processing, meaning removal takes considerably longer.

INHOPE's Call to Action

INHOPE is calling on the national governments of the European Union Members States and on the European Union legislators to act before the vital services to combat CSAM are lost.

From the European Commission:

The SIC model is the Commission's own creation. INHOPE is urging DG CONNECT to explore every available mechanism, including emergency instruments, reallocation, and phased arrangements, to prevent closures in the current cycle. We stand ready to work on solutions and we will continue to support our members as they continue to engage on a national level.

From national governments:

Financial investment in SIC hotlines is both legal responsibility and moral obligation. The form it takes will differ by country: direct grants, digital programme co-funding, DSA authority structures, technology sector contributions, or ministerial partnerships. What matters is that stable and predictable support is secured without delay.

From national Digital Services Coordinators:

DSA Trusted Flagger appointments for CSAM hotlines must be treated as a priority. Funding constraints must not be allowed to impede DSA implementation.

Conclusion

The Safer Internet Centre network protects children, upholds the law, and contributes to international child protection efforts in ways that no other system does. It was built over nearly three decades of European commitment and is now replicated across the world. What it needs now is the support, European and national, to continue doing what it was built to do.

For further information or to discuss this statement, please contact the INHOPE Secretariat at www.inhope.org.

Samantha Woolfe

Executive Director, INHOPE

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