Council of the European Union
General Secretariat

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WK 6661/2025 INIT

LIMITE

JAI	**FREMP**
ENFOPOL	**TELECOM**
CRIMORG	**COMPET**
IXIM	**MI**
DATAPROTECT	**CONSOM**
CYBER	**DIGIT**
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MEETING DOCUMENT

From:	Presidency
To:	Law Enforcement Working Party (Police)
Subject:	Universal Classification Schema for child sexual abuse material

In preparation of the meeting of JHA Counsellors on 27 May 2025, delegations are provided in the annex with supporting documents to facilitate the discussion on the Universal Classification Schema.

Explanatory note by the Presidency on the presentation and discussion of the Universal Classification Schema

Interpol and the International Association of Internet Hotlines (INHOPE) will present their work on the Universal Classification Schema at the meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Counsellors (Law Enforcement Working Party (Police)) on 27 May 2025. The Universal Classification Schema refers to the harmonisation of the terminology used by industry, hotlines, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), law enforcement and other government agencies dealing with child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and child sexual exploitation material (CSEM) for the purpose of reporting or investigating child sexual abuse and exploitation. The presentations and the discussion on the Universal Classification Schema serve practical purposes only and do not aim at introducing a harmonised legally binding classification with repercussions on criminal law. Details about the Universal Classification Schema are provided in ANNEX 2.

Following the presentations, delegations will be invited to respond to the following questions:

1) Do you have experience with any existing CSAM classification schema? If so, is the classification mandated by law, or is it an internal system designed to streamline the processing of reports?

2) Do you see the need to establish a common approach to classification schemas at the European level?

3) How do you currently deal with differences in CSAM content classification during international cooperation?

In addition, the Presidency invites delegations to provide replies to the questionnaire in ANNEX 3 to csa@consilium.europa.eu by 6 June 2025. The feedback from Member States would provide INHOPE and Interpol with information which might be helpful in the further development of the Universal Classification Schema.

INHOPE

Universal Classification Schema

Harmonising terminology for child exploitative material

Overview: The Universal Classification Schema is a standardized framework developed jointly by INHOPE, hotline analysts, law enforcement agencies, industry stakeholders, and subject matter experts to create a shared language for identifying and categorizing content. It addresses inconsistent legal definitions of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) across jurisdictions, enabling seamless data exchange and more coordinated responses.

Purpose and Goals:

- Harmonise Classification Standards: By aligning differing classification systems, the Schema ensures that data shared across national and regional borders remains accurate and legally compliant.

- Reduce Analyst Exposure: Standardizing classifications and enriching datasets lessens repetitive manual reviews, easing the workload and protecting staff wellbeing.

- Support Technology-Driven Solutions: With its unified structure, the Schema empowers AI and machine learning tools to detect CSAM more effectively, aiding victim identification and investigative processes.

How the Schema Works:

- Managing Jurisdictional Variations: Different countries define CSAM uniquely, hindering international cooperation. The Schema translates diverse legal criteria into a single, adaptable framework for consistent use.

- Enhancing Data Interoperability: It standardizes data formats and terminology, ensuring that shared information retains its meaning regardless of origin.

- Building on Proven Models: The Schema integrates with existing systems like NCMEC, Project VIC, and Intelligrade, making adoption straightforward across platforms.

Application and Use Cases:

- Law Enforcement and Legal Teams: The Schema clarifies cross-border investigations by maintaining consistent evidence classification, strengthening mutual legal assistance.

- Hotline Analysts and NGOs: It streamlines workflows, accelerates classification, and increases accuracy, benefiting both real-time response and long-term analysis.

- Technology Providers: Adopting the Schema allows platforms to align detection algorithms with regulatory standards, improving automated flagging of CSAM.

- Legislators and Policy Makers: The Schema offers precise categories and definitions to inform and harmonize national and EU legislation, ensuring consistent regulatory frameworks and facilitating compliance monitoring.

Next Steps:

- Requesting the Schema: Scan the QR code below or visit the INHOPE website (inhope.org) to obtain a copy of the Schema.

Schema Access Request Form

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ANNEX 2

Survey:

Needs and opportunities for implementing a Unified CSAM Content Classification – Universal Classification Schema (the Schema) in the Member States and at the EU level

No	Question by the Presidency	Purpose of the question	Member State's response
1.	Do you have experience with any existing CSAM classification schemas? If so, is the classification mandated by law, or is it an internal system designed to streamline the processing of reports?	Establishing a starting point – what systems/schemas are in place in a given country.	
2.	Do you see the need for a common approach to classification schemas at the European level?	Determining whether the lack of a common approach and uniform system is a real challenge.	
3.	How does your country currently deal with legislative differences in CSAM content classification during international cooperation?	To show the practical problems arising from the lack of a common classification.	
4.	Could a common approach at the European level (e.g. the Schema) help law enforcement respond more quickly to reports sent by online platforms, if those reports followed this classification?	Directing the discussion on the practical application of a universal classification schema in improving the operation of services and increasing effectiveness.	
5.	What conditions would need to be met for a universal classification schema (e.g. the Schema) to be formally recognised and implemented in your national legal or operational system?	Identify potential legal, procedural, and policy barriers that may hinder system implementation.	
6.	Do you see an opportunity for your country to actively participate in testing, developing or piloting the Schema?	Searching for partners ready for practical cooperation and testing the solution in real conditions.	
7.	What technical or organisational challenges do you foresee in possibly integrating the Schema in your country's existing systems?	To anticipate and plan for interoperability or resource-related issues.	