

EP: EU Action against Child Recruitment by Organised Crime



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News

On 18 June 2026, the European Parliament (EP) adopted a [resolution on the recruitment of children by organised crime](#). MEPs strongly condemned the recruitment and exploitation of children by organised criminal and terrorist groups, both online and offline, and described the phenomenon as a serious crime against children as well as a human rights violation. The best interests of children must guide the response of public authorities.

The resolution points to the increasing use of children as part of the operational strategies of criminal and terrorist groups: they may be used to shield adult perpetrators from detection and prosecution, to expand illicit activities, or to perform low-risk tasks with limited knowledge of the wider criminal network. According to Europol data, minors are involved in more than 70% of illegal market activities, including drug trafficking, extortion, online fraud, money laundering, illicit firearms trafficking, and violence-as-a-service schemes.

MEPs called for the future [EU action plan on the protection of children against crime](#) to include the following:

- A dedicated prevention pillar;
- An early-warning mechanisms involving schools, social services, and families;
- A youth-centred approach based on community engagement;
- An integrated protection system that are child-centred, gender-responsive, trauma-informed, and cross-sectoral.

As regards criminal law, Parliament asked the Commission to address child recruitment in the upcoming [proposal to modernise EU rules on organised crime](#). MEPs suggested that the recruitment of children could be treated as an aggravating circumstance and reinforced their call for a new common definition of “criminal organisation” – taking into account the use of violence, corruption, or intimidation. They also called for a revision of the EU Pyrotechnics Directive in order to address the use of pyrotechnics as weapons, including the exploitation of vulnerable young people.

The resolution further highlights the role of drug-related intimidation as a recruitment pathway and calls on Member States to incorporate interagency responses into national strategies. MEPs also urged stronger co-operation between Member States, Europol, and Eurojust, particularly in ports, logistics hubs, and urban areas with vulnerable communities.

A central part of the resolution concerns the online dimension of child recruitment. Parliament warned that digital services are used to identify, target, groom, manipulate, and coerce children. It called for robust and consistent enforcement of the Digital Services Act, in line with the Commission’s guidelines on the protection

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Preprint eucrim 2026, Vol. 21(2)

ISSN: 1862-6947

<https://eucrim.eu>



of minors, and for stronger protection of minors through the upcoming Digital Fairness Act. MEPs also welcomed Europol's Operational Taskforce GRIMM and called for joint investigations to target recruiters, instigators, and high-level actors, rather than focus only on minors who carry out offences.

Parliament finally called for stronger international cooperation, better data collection, and adequate EU funding for civil society organisations, community-based initiatives, sports associations, and educational programmes in areas particularly exposed to organised crime recruitment.

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The project is co-financed by the [Union Anti-Fraud Programme \(UAFP\)](#), managed by the [European Anti-Fraud Office \(OLAF\)](#).



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