

Operational Training

Needs Analysis

Child sexual exploitation

Stay ahead of crime





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OPERATIONAL TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS – CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (2025)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The assistance of those who contributed to this document is hereby acknowledged with gratitude.

PDF ISBN 978-92-9211-473-2 DOI 10.2825/0721995 QR-01-25-009-EN-N

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List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CEPOL	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training
CNU	Cepol National Unit
CKC	Cepol Knowledge Centre
COSEC	Combating the Online Sexual Exploitation of Children
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
EMPACT	European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats
EU	European Union
EU-STNA	CEPOL EU Strategic Training Needs Assessment
ISCE	International Child Sexual Exploitation
LE	Law Enforcement
MB	Management Board
MS	Member State/s
OTNA	Operational Training Needs Analysis
OSINT	Open-Source Intelligence
SDP	Single Programming Document
SOCTA	European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment
TOR	The Onion Router
TCN	Third-Country National
TTT	Train-the-Trainer
UK	United Kingdom
VID	Victim Identification
VPN	Virtual Private Network

Executive Summary

Between December 2024 and February 2025, CEPOL conducted an Operational Training Needs Analysis (OTNA) on Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) to identify relevant priority training needs across the European Union (EU). The consultation process relied on an online questionnaire structured around nine main training topics and collected 47 individual responses from 24 EU Member States (MS). The majority of responses were submitted by police authorities and respondents representing operational-level professionals.

The OTNA found the topics of **identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, investigation techniques and methodologies, prevention, victim-centric approach in investigations and support services, as well as mental welfare in CSE investigations, as those most frequently ranked among the highest training priorities at the EU level.** While the initial results point to the five aforementioned areas as the most critical for EU-level training, the topics of Artificial Intelligence (AI) related to child sexual exploitation and handling encryption and anonymisation services in online child sexual abuse also demonstrated strong relevance across responses, followed by financial investigations related to CSE cases, with offender management emerging as the only topic not prioritised by at least half of the responding countries. These findings suggest a broad recognition of evolving technological and investigative challenges in combatting CSE and the need for targeted, multi-level training to address them effectively.

Training needs across the CSE topics were consistently considered to be highly timely, with **average urgency ratings falling between moderate and urgent.** This indicates that receiving training within a year would be beneficial for improving performance and addressing emerging challenges, with some needs approaching the level of essential. While the topic of AI related to CSE was not among the top five priority topics in terms of priority frequency, its urgency scores clearly suggest that training in this area is needed within a year to ensure qualitative performance and operational readiness.

The statistical analysis estimates that **over 110 000 law enforcement officials across the EU may require training on the identified CSE topics.** However, this figure is more than six times higher than the actual number of participants reported by the responding MS, suggesting that the extrapolated participant volume may require further consideration and refinement to ensure it accurately reflects realistic training demand. **For the five highest-ranking topics** (in the below summary presented in the popularity order), **the estimated participant volume could reach up to 42 510 officials, with prevention and victim-centric approaches emerging as the most participant-intensive areas.**

Main topic	Participant estimation at EU level
Identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation	7 878
Investigation techniques and methodologies	7 293
Prevention	14 209
Victim centric approach	10 582
Mental welfare in child sexual exploitation investigations	2 548
Total	42 510

In terms of professional profiles, the statistical analysis suggests that officials falling under 'other' categories not predefined in the OTNA questionnaire would constitute the largest segment for training. Among the standard profiles, experts represent the highest estimated training demand, followed by managers and then by prosecutors, investigative judges, and investigators in nearly equal proportions. However, when balancing this with the actual (statistically non-processed) submissions from the

responding MS, the **training needs appear widely distributed across all profiles, with investigators emerging as the most frequently identified target group.**

This trend holds across the five highest-priority main topics, where **training needs are evident for all professional profiles**, with some variation depending on the topic and the method of analysis. Investigators consistently emerge as a key target group, particularly prominent in the areas of prevention and mental welfare. For topics such as identifying victims and investigation techniques, both statistical and non-processed data indicate strong demand across all profiles, though processed data places emphasis on intelligence officers, experts, and managers. Victim-centric approaches similarly show widespread demand, with the statistical analysis pointing to experts and managers as the primary beneficiaries, while the broader data underscores a need for training across a diverse range of profiles.

Profile	Participant estimation at EU level	Estimated share (%) of all EU level participants
Other	14 326	33.7%
Experts	6 890	16.2%
Managers	6 019	14.2%
Intelligence Officers	5 967	14.0%
Investigators	3 913	9.2%
Analysts	2 756	6.5%
Prosecutors, investigative judges, magistrates	2 639	6.2%
Total	42 510	100%

In terms of the proficiency level at which training should be targeted, the overall statistical analysis across all topics indicates **a strong emphasis on awareness-level training**, which accounts for over 45% of the total training requests. This trend is also reflected within the five highest-ranked topics. While this clearly highlights the importance of foundational training to ensure widespread baseline knowledge, the result is also significantly shaped by high-volume submissions from a few countries, specifically calling for large-scale awareness-level capacity-building.

When examining the non-statistically processed data, **training needs appear more evenly distributed across all proficiency levels, with a noticeable shift towards more advanced training.** For instance, in the area of identifying victims, the demand is spread across levels, with practitioner and advanced practitioner levels standing out. Investigation techniques and victim-centric approaches similarly show strong needs at advanced practitioner and expert levels. Mental welfare in CSE investigations also leans heavily towards advanced practitioner-level training, while prevention is more concentrated on awareness-level training.

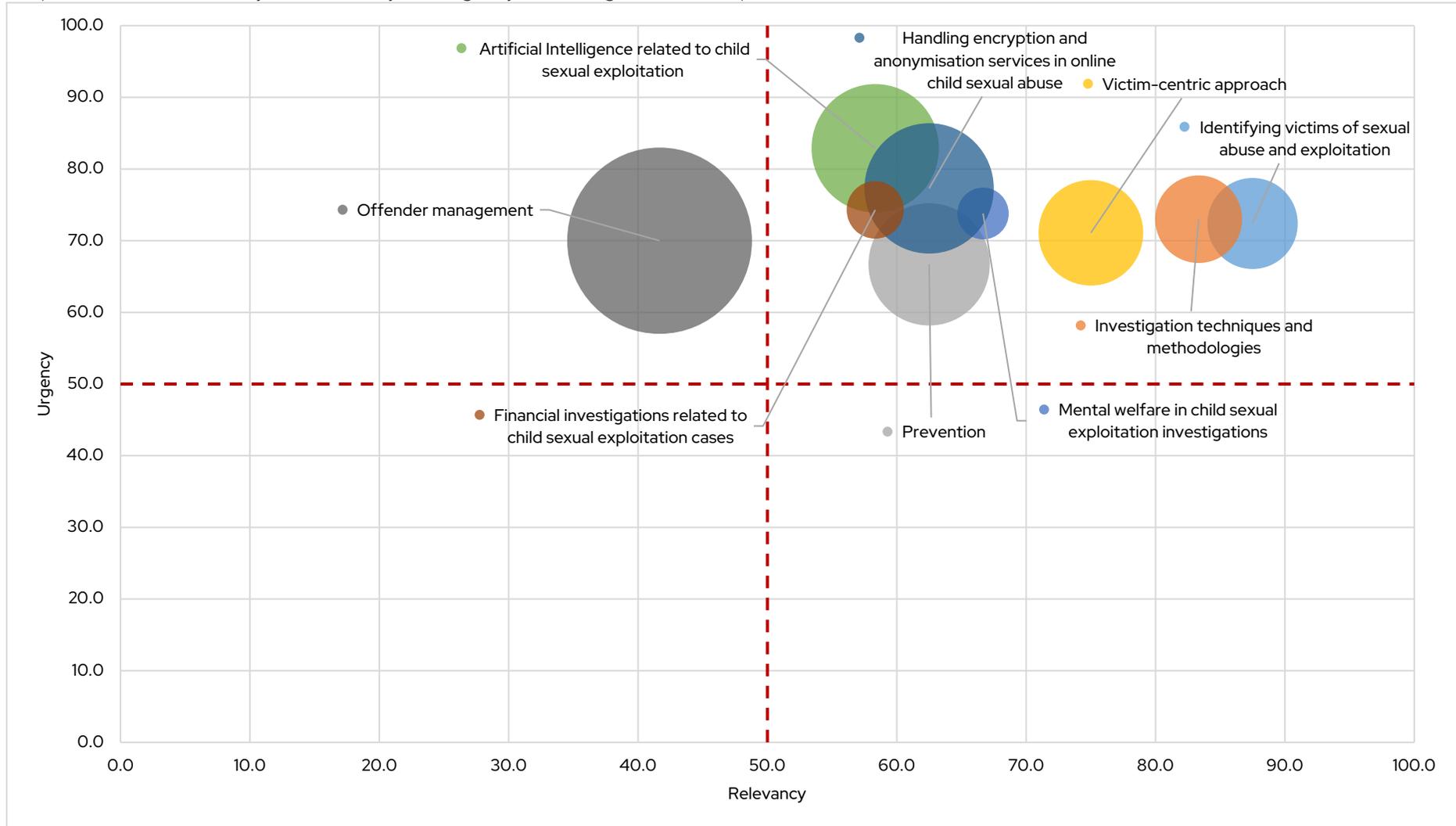
Proficiency level	Participant estimation at EU level	Estimated share (%) of all EU level participants
Awareness	17 550	41.3%
Practitioner	10 608	25.0%
Train-the-trainer	8 268	19.4%
Advanced practitioner	3 757	8.8%
Expert	2 327	5.5%
Total	42 510	100%

All subtopics presented under the different main topics were considered by respondents to be **highly relevant**. On the five highest priorities, training on identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation should focus on equipping officers with tools and methods for recognising abuse material, using media analysis for victim identification, and applying AI and big data analysis to support these efforts. Investigation techniques and methodologies' training should address proactive and intelligence-led approaches, the use of digital forensics, dark web monitoring, AI tools, and inter-agency cooperation, with an emphasis on keeping pace with evolving offender tactics. Training in victim-centric approaches should strengthen skills in trauma-informed interviewing, promote privacy and rights protection, and reinforce inter-agency coordination to prioritise victim welfare. Mental welfare training is needed to help professionals manage the psychological toll of working on CSE cases, including support tools, rights-based considerations, and preventative well-being strategies.

On the five highest-ranking topics, the differences in prioritisation between subtopics were minimal, confirming the overall training relevance of all areas proposed. On **identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation**, training should cover the detection of child abuse material, the use of images and videos for victim identification, information exchange between agencies, and the role of AI and big data analytics in victim identification. In this area, the respondents also indicated the need for specialised digital forensics, geolocation techniques, dark web monitoring, and open-source intelligence (OSINT). For **investigation techniques and methodologies**, key themes include proactive investigations, online undercover work, the use of open-source and dark web intelligence, new forensic tools, AI applications, and the identification of high-risk criminal networks. **Victim-centric approaches** focus on trauma-informed interviewing, inter-agency cooperation to protect victims, prevention strategies, and privacy and data protection safeguards. **Mental welfare training** should address psychological support tools and techniques for staff, preventive measures for well-being, and respect for the privacy of those working in this sensitive field.

All topics covered in the OTNA received indications of regional training needs, confirming that **CSE is widely recognised as a cross-border challenge requiring coordinated responses**. For the five highest-ranked topics, regional training was suggested by a wide range of countries, bringing up repeated references to regional clusters with shared legal, operational, or linguistic contexts, as well as training interests that extend beyond the EU.

Graphic 1 - Eisenhower analysis – relevancy and urgency of training on all main topics



Introduction

CEPOL, as outlined in Article 3 of Regulation 2015/2219¹, is mandated to support, develop, implement, and coordinate training for law enforcement professionals, with a strong emphasis on safeguarding human rights and fundamental freedoms within the law enforcement context. The agency plays a key role in strengthening cross-border cooperation by providing vocational training that enhances law enforcement's capacity to prevent and combat serious and organised crime, terrorism, and emerging security threats.

To form its training portfolio, CEPOL relies on the findings of OTNAs, which are regularly conducted on priority topics identified in the EU Strategic Training Needs Assessment (EU-STNA). As specified in the Single Programming Document (SPD) 2023–2026², OTNAs are instrumental in ensuring that CEPOL's training programmes align with the operational needs of EU MS. The OTNA process follows a structured seven-step methodology developed in close collaboration with CEPOL National Units (CNU), CEPOL Knowledge Centres (CKC), and various law enforcement agencies. Initially piloted in 2018 and formally adopted by CEPOL's Management Board (MB) through [Decision 32/2017/MB](#), the methodology was updated in 2020 to better reflect evolving needs and feedback from MS³. The OTNA primarily targets law enforcement officials, as defined in Article 2 of Regulation 2015/2219⁴.

The OTNA on Child Sexual Exploitation examined nine main topics, addressing key areas essential for enhancing law enforcement capabilities in tackling this crime. These topics include:

- Identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation
- Investigation techniques and methodologies
- Handling encryption and anonymisation services in online child sexual abuse
- Financial investigations related to child sexual exploitation cases
- Victim-centric approach in investigations and support services
- Offender management strategies
- Mental welfare considerations in child sexual exploitation investigations
- The role of Artificial Intelligence in combatting child sexual exploitation
- Prevention

The OTNA data collection was carried out through an online questionnaire between December 2024 and February 2025, inviting 26 EU MS and relevant EU institutions to provide insights into training needs on child sexual exploitation. The survey received 47 responses from various law enforcement agencies across 24 different MS. Poland contributed the highest number of responses, with 12 individual submissions, accounting for over 25% of the total responses⁵.

¹ Available on: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32015R2219&from=EN>

² <https://www.cepol.europa.eu/about/key-documents?pg=1>, Annex to Management Board Decision 17/2022/MB, CEPOL Single Programming Document 2024–2026, (13 December 2022), p. 5.

³ Since then, CEPOL has conducted numerous OTNAs across various training topics within the EU-STNA, supplemented by extraordinary assessments where necessary.

⁴ [Regulation \(EU\) 2015/2219 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 November 2015 on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training \(CEPOL\) and replacing and repealing Council Decision 2005/681/JHA - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵ The strong representation of Poland has been taken into account in the analysis. While the OTNA methodology relies on the highest given score per each contributing MS in terms of training relevance and urgency and balances the estimated level of potential participants by calculating the statistical median (i.e., the middle value) extrapolated to the EU level, this overrepresentation may inflate the total submission-based view of potential participants.

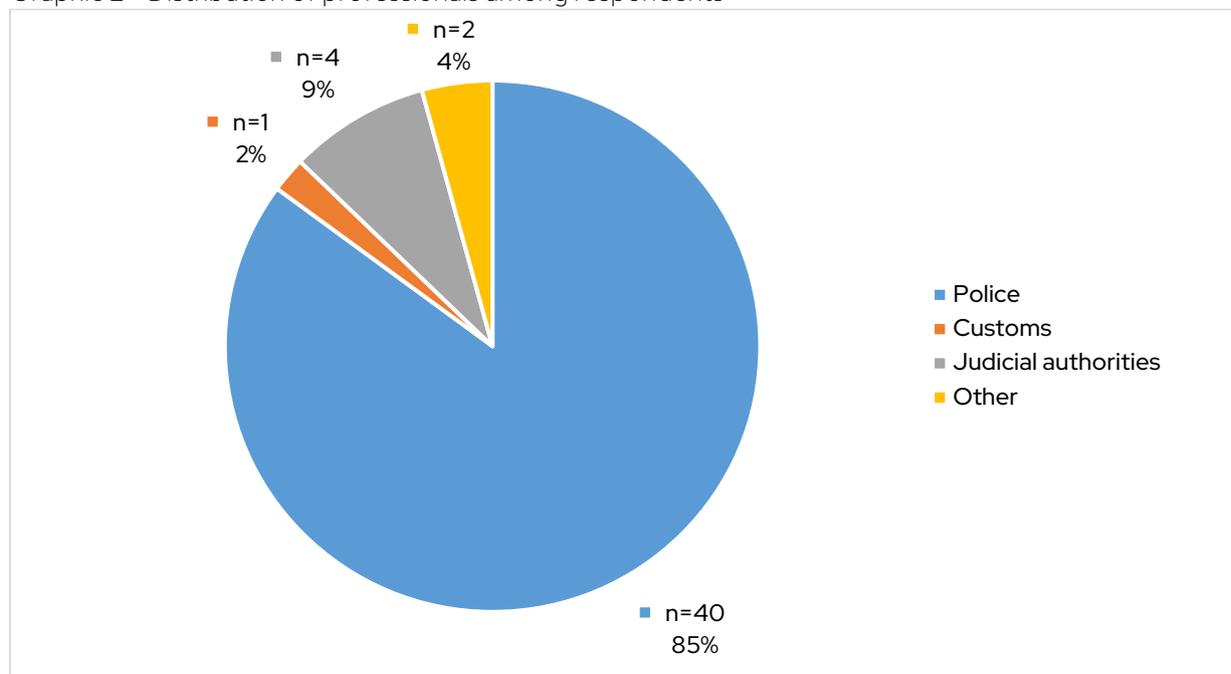
Apart from Poland, the distribution of responses across contributing countries remained balanced, with each responding MS providing 1-3 individual responses. The overall representation of different MS in the OTNA data collection is detailed in **Table 1** below. The first column displays the number of responses (n), while the second column presents the percentage share (%), indicating each country's proportion of responses relative to the total number of responses (N) in the study.

Table 1 – Responding countries

PL	Poland	12	25.5 %	CZ	Czechia	1	2.1%
HR	Croatia	3	6.4 %	EE	Estonia	1	2.1%
FI	Finland	3	6.4 %	GR	Greece	1	2.1%
LV	Latvia	3	6.4 %	HU	Hungary	1	2.1%
SE	Sweden	3	6.4 %	IE	Ireland	1	2.1%
BE	Belgium	2	4.3 %	IT	Italy	1	2.1%
FR	France	2	4.3 %	LT	Lithuania	1	2.1%
PT	Portugal	2	4.3 %	LU	Luxembourg	1	2.1%
SK	Slovakia	2	4.3 %	MT	Malta	1	2.1%
AT	Austria	1	2.1 %	LT	Netherlands	1	2.1%
BG	Bulgaria	1	2.1 %	RO	Romania	1	2.1%
CY	Cyprus	1	2.1 %	SI	Slovenia	1	2.1%
Total: 47 responses from 24 countries							

As summarised in **Graphic 2**, the majority of responses came from police, accounting for >85% of the total submissions. Four responses were received from judicial authorities, with one response from customs authorities. Two responses were classified under 'Other', originating from Prosecution Offices in Croatia and Latvia.

Graphic 2 – Distribution of professionals among respondents

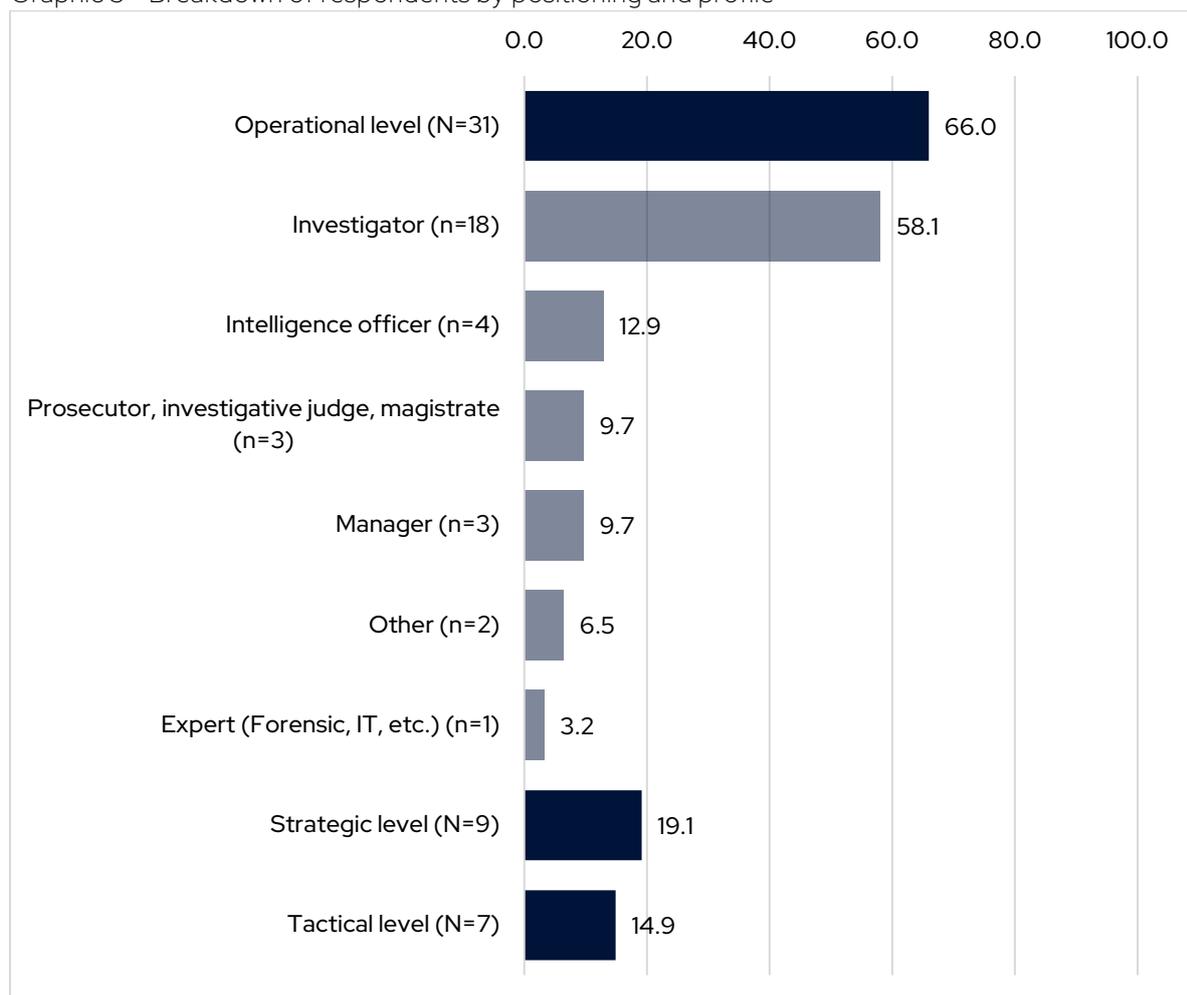


The questionnaire asked respondents to indicate their positioning within their organisation as **operational** (individuals or immediate teams handling child sexual exploitation cases in more than 50% of their workload, such as investigators, domain specialists, and covert internet investigators), **tactical**

(representing teams or regional units, including investigative team leaders and criminal intelligence handlers), or **strategic** (answering on behalf of their entire organisation, including senior management, national unit representatives, and centralised points of contact). Those at the operational level were also asked to specify their profile in more detail and indicate whether their assigned cases predominantly involved child sexual exploitation.

As shown in **Graphic 3**, the majority of respondents (66%, n=31) represent the operational level, with 71% (n=22) indicating that more than half of their assigned cases, or those of their immediate colleagues, involve child sexual exploitation. Among operational-level respondents, investigators accounted for the largest share, making up more than 58% of this group. Strategic and tactical levels had lower response rates but were still represented by nine respondents at the strategic level and seven at the tactical level.

Graphic 3 – Breakdown of respondents by positioning and profile



Respondents at the strategic and tactical levels were also asked to provide estimates on the number of law enforcement officers actively involved in criminal investigations of child sexual exploitation. This figure encompasses both specialised officers and those handling such cases as part of their broader investigative duties. Additionally, they were asked to specify how many of these officers are exclusively dedicated to child sexual exploitation investigations, meaning they are assigned to specialised units or positions where more than 50% of their caseload is related to child sexual exploitation crimes.

The responses from strategic and tactical level representatives regarding the number of law enforcement officers involved in CSE investigations vary significantly, reflecting differing national structures, operational models, and prioritisation of resources across MS. Some countries, such

as France and Finland, reported large numbers of officers engaged in CSE investigations, suggesting a broad distribution of responsibilities across general law enforcement personnel. In contrast, other countries indicated smaller, more specialised units handling these cases. A key trend visible in the responses is that while some countries dedicate a significant portion of officers to specialised CSE investigations, others report that most of their CSE-related personnel handle these cases as part of their general workload. Additionally, the responses reveal that some tactical-level respondents provided significantly lower estimates than strategic-level counterparts, which may indicate differences in how CSE-related responsibilities are viewed and distributed at different organisational levels.

As a complementary data collection method and to clarify certain aspects of the training needs identified through the questionnaire, eleven respondents from ten responding MS⁶ were invited to participate in follow-up consultations. These were conducted via online interviews and/or written exchanges, providing additional context and helping to refine the interpretation of the data.

Analysis

The OTNA survey primarily gathered quantitative data, supplemented by qualitative text-based feedback to provide deeper insights into training needs related to CSE. The collected data was processed using Qualtrics® and analysed in line with CEPOL's established OTNA methodology, which applies a combination of quantitative analysis and qualitative interpretation. To further refine the findings, selected respondents from different EU MS were invited for interviews, providing additional context on specific training needs and priorities. Together, these findings serve as the foundation for CEPOL's future training portfolio, ensuring that the most relevant and urgent capacity-building needs in tackling CSE are addressed.

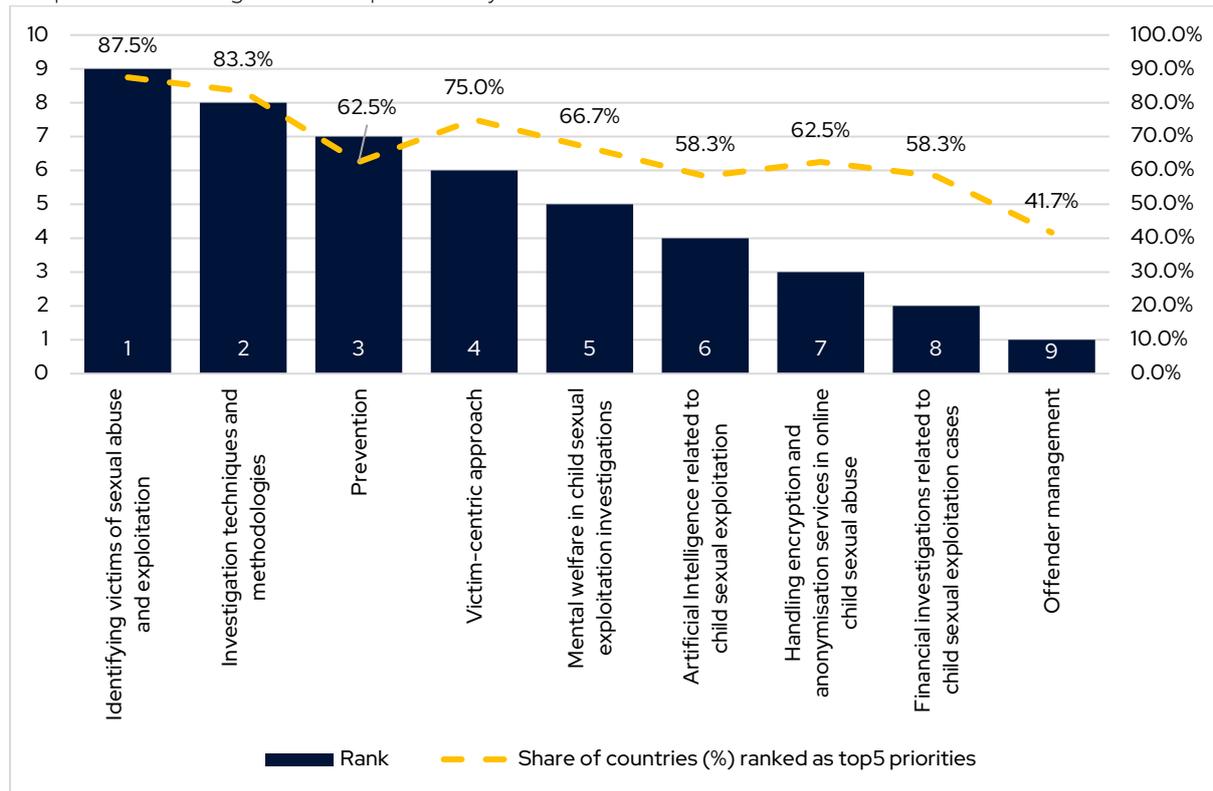
Relevance of topics and subtopics

The questionnaire included a ranking exercise to identify the most important training topics in the domain of child sexual exploitation for 2026–2028. Respondents were asked to prioritise nine main topics, after which they were invited to provide further details on the five they ranked highest. In the analysis, the priority ranking was established using a two-step analytical approach. First, an overall rank score was calculated across all individual responses, with a lower score indicating higher priority. Second, as a validation method and in line with the EU OTNA methodology, a consolidated country-based ranking was applied, i.e., where multiple responses were received from the same country, only the highest-ranking score (i.e., lowest value) was used. Based on this method of assessment, the topics of **identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, investigation techniques and methodologies, prevention, victim-centric approach in investigations and support services, and mental welfare in child sexual exploitation investigations** emerged as the top priorities. If measured in the share of responding MS where at least one respondent ranked the topic among their top five, the same five topics emerge as priorities. However, in this approach, the topics of prevention and mental welfare in child sexual exploitation investigations switch places, indicating a slightly higher prioritisation of mental welfare. Nevertheless, regardless of the assessment method, the analysis consistently supports these five topics as solid priorities for EU-level training.

Graphic 4 presents the ranking of the main topics, arranged by overall popularity based on the cumulative ranking scores from all individual responses. The yellow dotted line illustrates the consolidated view, showing the percentage of responding countries where at least one respondent ranked the topic between 1 and 5.

⁶ Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Sweden

Graphic 4 - Ranking of main topics surveyed



To gain deeper insights into training priorities, respondents were also prompted to provide additional details for the five topics they ranked as their highest priorities. As presented in **Table 2** below, all subtopics listed under the various main topics—arranged in descending order of priority, with a red line separating the top five from the remaining four—were assessed as highly relevant by the respondents. This indicates that even among topics ranked lower overall, specific subtopics were still considered significant for those addressing those main topics.

Table 2 - Relevance rates of subtopics across all main topics

Main topic	Subtopic	Relevance
Identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation	Detecting child abuse material: Applying tools and techniques to accurately detect illegal content	83.3%
	Images and videos for victim identification purposes: Using media analysis to identify and locate victims of exploitation	82.1%
	Cooperation, information exchange, and interoperability: Collaborating across organisations for effective victim identification	81.0%
	Implications of AI: How does AI affect VID operations, how criminals misuse AI and how law enforcement can responsibly use AI to enhance investigations	75.0%
	Analysis of Big Data: Leveraging large datasets to find patterns that can aid in victim identification	63.1%
Investigation techniques and methodologies	Proactive investigation: Identifying and targeting offenders before crimes escalate	83.8%
	Use of OSINT and the Dark Web: Leveraging open-source and dark web intelligence for investigation	82.5%
	Self-generated child sexual abuse material: Addressing cases where minors produce their own abusive content under coercion	76.3%
	Use of new forensic tools: Employing cutting-edge tools for digital evidence gathering	76.3%

Main topic	Subtopic	Relevance
	Cooperation, Information Exchange, and Interoperability: strengthening inter-agency collaboration for efficient investigations	73.8%
	Detecting child abuse material: Identifying exploitative content using forensic and digital tools	73.8%
	Implications of AI: How does AI affect child sexual exploitation-related operations, how criminals misuse AI and how law enforcement can responsibly use AI to enhance investigations	72.5%
	Developing and applying innovative investigation methods: Adapting new methods to keep pace with evolving threats	72.5%
	Online undercover operations: Conducting covert operations online to infiltrate abusive networks	71.3%
	Identification of High-Risk Criminal Networks: Pinpointing organised groups engaged in exploitation	70.0%
Prevention	<i>No specific subtopics presented</i>	<i>n/a</i>
Victim-centric approach in investigations and support services	Interviewing techniques: Conducting trauma-informed interviews with sensitivity	77.8%
	Prevention: Implementing strategies to prevent victimisation and reduce harm	69.4%
	Cooperation, information exchange, and interoperability: Sharing information to prioritise victim welfare	68.1%
	Fundamental rights and data protection: Protecting victims' privacy in investigative processes	63.9%
Mental welfare in child sexual exploitation investigations	Prevention: Creating a supportive environment to mitigate psychological impact	79.7%
	Tools and techniques for psychological support: Providing mental health resources for investigators and others affected by their work	78.1%
	Fundamental rights and data protection: Protecting the privacy of staff working in child sexual exploitation investigations	73.4%
Artificial Intelligence related to child sexual exploitation	Use of AI by law enforcement in child sexual exploitation investigations: Deploying AI to improve investigative efficiency and precision	92.9%
	AI-generated child sexual abuse material: Recognising AI-generated content to adapt detection techniques	91.1%
	Active law enforcement participation in training AI: Understanding AI and adding valuable input to training AI models to assure quality AI assistance in investigations	91.1%
Handling encryption and anonymisation services in online child sexual abuse	VPN: Understanding how virtual private networks conceal identities in child sexual exploitation cases	78.3%
	Proxy servers: Analysing proxy usage that hides online identities and locations	75.0%
	Tor: Investigating the Tor network and its role in anonymous child abuse activities	73.3%
	Cooperation, information exchange, and interoperability: Sharing expertise to address encryption challenges	70.0%
	Implications of AI: How does AI affect cyberspace operations, how criminals misuse AI and how law enforcement can responsibly use AI to enhance investigations	73.3%
Financial investigations related to child sexual exploitation cases	Online payment methods, including virtual currencies: Tracing payments to track financial flows in child sexual exploitation activities, including cryptocurrencies but also other forms of online/virtual payment methods	73.2%
	Cooperation, information exchange, and interoperability: Partnering across sectors for financial intelligence	73.2%
	Implications of AI: How can law enforcement responsibly use AI to enhance financial investigations	71.4%

Main topic	Subtopic	Relevance
Offender management	Risk assessment: Evaluating offender profiles to manage future risks	70.0%
	Prevention: establishing offender intervention programmes to prevent recidivism	70.0%
	Cooperation, information exchange, and interoperability: Exchanging information for tracking offenders	77.5%

Additional subtopics

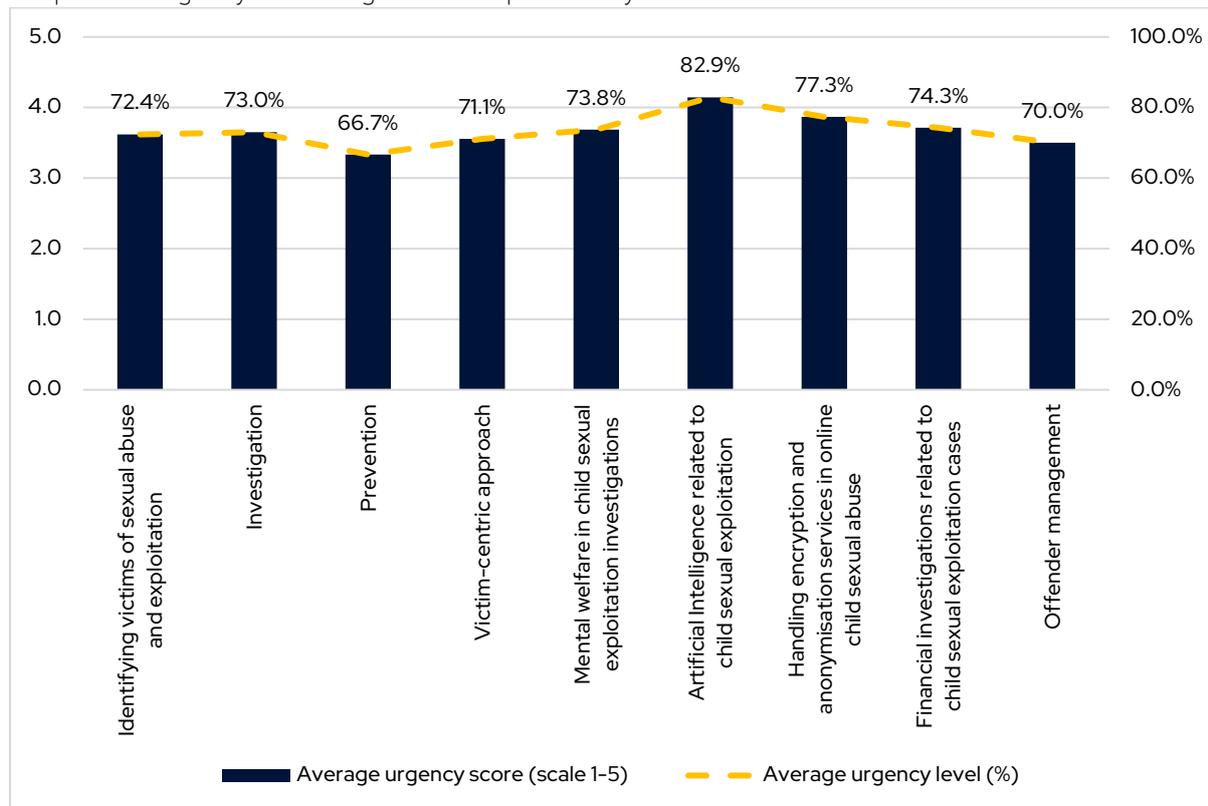
Respondents also proposed additional subtopics across three main topics. Under **identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation**, suggestions pointed to advanced digital forensics, including the extraction of evidence from digital devices, metadata analysis for time and location tracking, and the use of geolocation and OSINT to trace victims and perpetrators. Respondents also highlighted the need for training on navigating the dark web to detect illegal content and trafficking networks. The value of immersive, experience-based learning was emphasised, with specific praise for CEPOL’s practical courses involving international experts and peer exchanges. In the area of **handling encryption and anonymisation services**, respondents expressed the need for technical training on decryption methods, including brute force and key recovery, detecting hidden data, and the use of forensic tools. Special emphasis was placed on investigating encrypted communication platforms such as Signal, WhatsApp, and Telegram, including techniques for intercepting and analysing metadata. With regard to **financial investigations**, proposed subtopics included tracing cryptocurrency transactions and the use of specialised tools to track flows through e-wallets, highlighting the importance of financial tracking capabilities in tackling child sexual exploitation cases. These suggestions point to a growing recognition of the need for highly specialised, technical training modules to support frontline practitioners in keeping pace with evolving criminal tactics and digital environments.

Urgency and volume of training needs

In the OTNA questionnaire, urgency was measured on a 1–5 scale, where one represented "not urgent" and five indicated "very urgent." **Overall, the need for training across all surveyed main topics is urgent.** The combined average urgency score across all topics is 3.7, reflecting a broadly recognised need for urgent training, defined as essential and ideally to be delivered within one year to support operational effectiveness and maintain performance standards. Notably, the topic of AI related to CSE reached an average urgency score above 4. This suggests that although fewer countries selected it as a standalone topic among their top five priorities, those who did consider it a critical training need requiring immediate delivery to ensure the successful execution of their duties.

A detailed overview of urgency levels across all main topics is presented in **Graphic 5** below. The white numbers inside the bars indicate the average urgency score for each main topic, while the dotted line represents the same data in a percentage view.

Graphic 5 - Urgency of training on main topics surveyed



In evaluating the extent to which training should be provided to European law enforcement professionals, the OTNA methodology utilises the statistical median, i.e., the middle value in a dataset when arranged in ascending order, which provides a balanced estimate less influenced by extreme variations. This median is then extrapolated to the EU level by multiplying it by the number of MS participating in the CEPOL regulation.

Following this approach, when aggregating estimates across all main topics, the potential number of law enforcement officials in need of training at the EU level could exceed 110 000⁷. **For the five priority main topics, the estimated number of officials requiring training at the EU level amounts to approximately 42 510.** Among these, the areas of prevention and victim-centric approaches in investigations and support services appear to be the most participant-intensive. For the topics of identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, investigation techniques, and victim-centric methodologies, the participant estimations received from the MS were relatively consistent and evenly distributed, providing a solid basis for statistical processing and extrapolation to the EU level. In the case of prevention, while the topic was clearly established as a priority, detailed training needs data were submitted by only eight countries⁸, limiting the depth of quantitative analysis.

⁷ The total number of participants reported directly through the questionnaire responses, prior to any statistical processing or extrapolation, amounts to 17 522.

⁸ Additional countries that indicated prevention as a priority topic have been invited for interviews to further clarify their training needs and perspectives.

It is also important to note that some topics—particularly those ranked below the top five in terms of prioritisation, significantly inflate the estimated participant figures⁹.

Table 3 below presents the overall participant volumes identified at the main topic level, offering a comparative view between the median-based EU-level estimation and the actual total submissions provided by all respondents, which remain unprocessed statistically.

Table 3 - Number of potential participants per main topic - median-based EU estimate vs raw data submissions

Main topic	Median-based at EU level	Total
Identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation	7 878	3 760
Investigation techniques and methodologies	7 293	3 914
Victim-centric approach in investigations and support services	10 582	3 473
Prevention	14 209	572
Mental welfare considerations in child sexual exploitation investigations	2 548	406
Handling encryption and anonymisation services in online child sexual abuse	16 146	900
The role of Artificial Intelligence in combatting child sexual exploitation	15 665	848
Financial investigations related to child sexual exploitation cases	3 146	377
Offender management strategies	32 968	3 272
Total	110 435	17 522

Profiles and proficiency levels

When considering all main topics across the three dimensions (law enforcement cooperation, information exchange, and interoperability) together, the distribution of potential participants by proficiency level, as shown in **Table 4**, suggests a strong emphasis on awareness-level training.

Table 4 - Proficiency levels and number of participants – all main topics surveyed

Proficiency level	Number of participants (at EU level)	Share (%)
Awareness	50 375	45.6%
Practitioner	26 325	23.8%
Advanced practitioner	5 928	5.4%
Expert	5 603	5.1%
Train-the-trainer	22 204	20.1%
Total	110 435	100%

Looking at the top five main topics, the general trend of training needs appears consistent in terms of the required proficiency levels, with most submissions indicating a need for practitioner-level training, complemented by awareness-raising and more specialised expert-level interventions where applicable. However, a more detailed analysis suggests that the overall figures, particularly at the awareness level,

⁹ In particular, the extrapolated numbers for offender management strategies, handling encryption and anonymisation services in online child sexual abuse, and the role of Artificial Intelligence in combatting child sexual exploitation appear disproportionately high. This suggests that the ratio between reported participant volumes and the extrapolated EU-level figures may not accurately reflect the actual training demand and should, therefore, be interpreted with caution. This data distortion primarily originates from submissions by a single country - namely Sweden and Portugal - where respondents indicated estimated training needs ranging from 100 to 500 participants across multiple professional profiles and proficiency levels. While these high-volume entries may accurately reflect national-level needs, their influence on the extrapolated EU-level figures is disproportionate, and data from only one or two MS is likely not sufficient to draw generalised conclusions applicable across the EU.

are notably influenced by data gaps and/or outliers¹⁰, which should be interpreted with caution. Extrapolating such entries to the EU level is not recommended, as single-country submissions do not provide a representative sample.

Upon removal of the influence of these statistical outliers, the analysis reveals that **among the five main topics identified as EU-level training priorities, practitioner-level training emerges as the most in-demand**. It accounts for approximately 25% of the total projected participants, with an estimated 10 600 officials requiring such training.

In terms of professional profiles, the analysed data suggests a disproportionately high concentration under the 'Other' category, exceeding that of any single predefined profile group in the questionnaire. However, this outcome is largely influenced by submissions from individual MS on specific topics¹¹, and should not be over-interpreted as representative of the wider EU landscape. When these outlier effects are considered, the data instead point to a more balanced distribution of training needs across standard professional profiles, including experts, managers, and intelligence officers, each accounting for approximately 10.8% of the total projected participants. **Table 5** presents the breakdown of potential participant profiles across all main topics.

Table 5 - Profiles of potential participants – all main topics surveyed

Category	Number of participants	Share % of all trainees
Investigators	6 799	6.16%
Intelligence Officers	11 362	10.29%
Analysts	9 438	8.55%
Managers	13 182	11.94%
Prosecutors, investigative judges, magistrates	11 973	10.84%
Experts	17 095	15.48%
Other	40 586	36.75%
Total	110 435	100.00%

When focusing on the five suggested priority main topics, this trend remains broadly consistent, albeit with slight refinement. While the 'Other' category continues to dominate, **the largest shares among the predefined profiles are held by experts, managers, and intelligence officers**. However, all remaining profile categories follow closely behind, indicating a relatively even distribution of training needs across professional functions.

Trainees per country

As part of the data analysis, the distribution of reported participant volumes was examined at the country level. **Table 6** below presents the actual numbers submitted by each responding country—i.e., the raw participant figures reported directly through the questionnaire, without any statistical processing or extrapolation.

¹⁰ This is particularly relevant to the topic of prevention. One submission from Sweden indicated an awareness-level training need for an 'Other' participant profile. When extrapolated to the EU level, this single entry results in an estimated 13 000 potential participants. While not further specified, these participants appear to refer to a customs context—likely encompassing operational enforcement officers involved in inspections, risk profiling, and mobile control. Given the broad nature of the term 'Control' and the absence of a more detailed breakdown, this figure should be interpreted with caution when estimating EU-wide training demand.

¹¹ Particularly concerning the topics of offender management strategies, handling encryption and anonymisation services in online child sexual abuse, and the role of Artificial Intelligence in combatting child sexual exploitation.

Table 6 - Volume of potential trainees per responding country - law enforcement cooperation, information exchange and interoperability

Country/topic	Total number of participants	Share (%) of participants
Portugal	12 350	70.5%
Sweden	1 826	10.4%
Austria	838	4.8%
Latvia	441	2.5%
Poland	404	2.3%
Italy	300	1.7%
Finland	233	1.3%
Estonia	186	1.1%
Romania	138	0.8%
Greece	116	0.7%
France	109	0.6%
Belgium	103	0.6%
Cyprus	71	0.4%
Lithuania	66	0.4%
Hungary	56	0.3%
Slovenia	50	0.3%
Czechia	43	0.2%
Ireland	41	0.2%
Croatia	33	0.2%
Malta	32	0.2%
Netherlands	30	0.2%
Slovakia	23	0.1%
Bulgaria	17	0.1%
Luxembourg	16	0.1%
Total	17 522	100%

As shown in the table, while most country-specific submissions indicate moderate volumes, Portugal stands out with the highest reported number, accounting for a significant share of the total (>70%) with up to 12 350 participants¹².

Further training suggestions

In addition to the predefined main topics and subtopics included in the OTNA questionnaire, respondents were given the opportunity to propose further training needs not explicitly covered in the survey. This open-ended option aimed to capture emerging or specialised needs that may not have been addressed elsewhere in the questionnaire. This opportunity was used to a limited extent, with only three MS submitting proposals as follows:

- **Hungary** proposed a training course on image analysis – tools and techniques, with a suggested audience including eight investigators, two intelligence officers, three analysts, five managers, and prosecutors or magistrates. All were indicated at the advanced practitioner level, with a secondary urgency.
- **Belgium** suggested victim identification training at the advanced practitioner level, with a crucial urgency level. The specific target audience was not detailed.

¹² Portugal's high participant submission originates from a single respondent who consistently indicated 100 participants for each possible professional profile across all proficiency levels on four main topics marked as priority: identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, investigation, victim-centric approaches, and offender management strategies. The respondent was invited for an interview to clarify and specify the indicated training needs.

- **Sweden** proposed training on arranging an interrogation with a suspect, also at the advanced practitioner level, with a moderate urgency.

The training needs indicated are in line with the most relevant topics of this analysis, namely, with Identifying victims of child abuse and exploitation and with Investigation techniques and methodologies.

Existing training on the national and international level

In the questionnaire, respondents who identified themselves as representing strategic or tactical levels were asked to indicate what kind of national or international training activities in the field of child sexual exploitation they or their colleagues attended during 2024. Representatives from six countries¹³ provided relevant details, accounting for 37.5% of all respondents at the strategic or tactical level (n=16). The details vary in completeness, and in some instances, elements such as participant numbers under “target group” appear to reflect internal coding or placeholders rather than precise participant categories. The summary below outlines the **information provided by strategic and tactical level respondents** regarding training activities attended or available in 2024.

- **Finland** reported on both foundational and targeted training. One course provided investigators and prosecutors with basic knowledge of sexual crimes and crimes against children. A second training was directed specifically at heads of investigation units and prosecutors, aiming to deepen their expertise in the topic. Both were delivered on-site and addressed at the practitioner level.
- **France** outlined a broad set of practitioner-level, on-site training activities, all aimed at investigators. These included modules on victim identification using tools like VID and OSINT techniques, forensic aspects of CSE investigations, victim interviews, and offender management.
- **Ireland** highlighted practitioner- and advanced practitioner-level training for investigators and analysts, particularly on Interpol’s Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) database and the Combating the Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (COSEC) training course. These sessions were delivered on-site.
- **Italy** submitted a set of training sessions on CSE-related topics, including peer-to-peer offences, dark web investigations, and social media analysis. While detailed target groups or training aims were not provided, the inclusion of online formats alongside on-site sessions suggests blended learning efforts. These training sessions were listed at advanced practitioner or unspecified levels.
- **Latvia** reported the most extensive training input, with seven detailed entries. The training covered a wide range of CSE-relevant topics, from investigation and legal proceedings involving minor victims to victim support, child protection rights, and prevention strategies. The majority were delivered on-site and targeted practitioners to advanced practitioner levels. Online courses were also included, particularly on EU-level victim rights and legal frameworks.
- **Portugal** reported two expert-level, on-site training sessions; one focused on child sexual exploitation for investigators and another on prevention directed at potential victims. However, further details on format, structure, or training aim were not included.

Respondents who indicated **representing the operational level** were asked to provide information on any training they had received in 2024, including the topics covered and the level at which the training was delivered. While all operational-level respondents (21 out of 31) did not submit full details, inputs were received from 15 different countries.

The collected data indicate that training has been conducted across all nine main topics related to child sexual exploitation, with a relatively balanced thematic spread. A general trend observed across all topics is that awareness-level training was the most frequently attended. This was followed by training at advanced practitioner and practitioner levels, which, considering the wider findings of this OTNA,

¹³ Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, and Portugal

appear to reflect the most demanded training tier. Expert-level training was also well represented, while participation in Train-the-Trainer programmes was notably limited. Country-specific analysis reveals that Poland reported the most extensive engagement, covering all nine topics and all proficiency levels. This reflects both a high level of national training activity and the country's strong representation in the OTNA response set. Latvia, Czechia, and Slovenia also provided indications of participation in training across several CSE topics, mostly at advanced practitioner or expert levels, suggesting a structured and specialised approach to CSE capacity building. On the other end of the spectrum, a few countries indicated training in only one or two areas, often limited to awareness level, pointing to possible gaps in coverage or limited access to more advanced training formats. The summary below provides a country-by-country overview of the training topics and levels attended, as reported by **operational-level respondents**.

- **Belgium** reported attending training on identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation and on investigation techniques, both at expert level. Additionally, training on handling encryption and anonymisation services was attended at the awareness level.
- **Bulgaria** indicated training attendance across all nine topics. Most training sessions were at the practitioner or awareness level, suggesting broad and foundational training coverage.
- **Croatia** participated in training across all topics, mostly at the awareness level, with advanced practitioner-level training reported for investigation and victim-centric approaches.
- **Cyprus** reported training across all topics except for Artificial Intelligence, with a focus on awareness and practitioner levels. One topic was addressed at the advanced practitioner level.
- **Czechia** attended training in all nine topics, with balanced coverage across practitioner and advanced practitioner levels.
- **Estonia** reported training in six topics, mainly at advanced practitioner and awareness levels, with no training reported for identifying victims or financial investigations.
- **Finland** reported attending expert-level training on the investigation, with no training reported in other areas.
- **Greece** covered all nine training topics, with participation primarily at awareness and practitioner levels and one topic at the advanced practitioner level.
- **Latvia** showed extensive training engagement, participating in all topics at either the expert or advanced practitioner level, with some topics also attended at the awareness level.
- **Malta** reported training in most topics, all at the advanced practitioner level, suggesting a focus on specialised, high-level training.
- **Poland** reported the widest coverage, attending training in all topics and all levels, including train-the-trainer, indicating a strong institutional investment in training.
- **Portugal** indicated training across all nine topics, with all attended at the awareness level, suggesting foundational capacity-building across the board.
- **Slovakia** participated in all training topics, predominantly at awareness and advanced practitioner levels.
- **Slovenia** reported high-level participation, with most trainings attended at practitioner, advanced practitioner, or expert level.
- **Sweden** indicated training attendance on identifying victims at an expert level and investigation at the awareness level, with no other topics reported.

Regional training needs

As part of the OTNA questionnaire, respondents were given the opportunity to indicate whether specific training topics in the area of child sexual exploitation should be addressed through a regional training approach, identifying the countries or regions they consider relevant for such delivery.

A key observation from the data is that many respondents referenced only their own country as a target for training, which may suggest a focus on nationally tailored training needs or a preference for national-

level training delivery, particularly where systems, laws, or challenges are context-specific. This pattern appears across several topics, most notably for France, Latvia, Poland, and Sweden, whose submissions often list only their own country. That said, there are also indications of regional or cross-border training needs, especially from countries like Croatia, Portugal, and Romania, whose submissions frequently reference multiple EU MS and, in some cases, non-EU countries. For instance, Croatia repeatedly points to regional cooperation with Austria, Hungary, Italy, and Slovenia, suggesting a Central and South-eastern European cluster where shared operational contexts or challenges may necessitate regional capacity-building. Similarly, Portugal consistently lists a wide network of countries, including Lusophone non-EU partners such as Cape Verde, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Timor-Leste, indicating a clear interest in transnational cooperation beyond the EU. Romania also shows a strong emphasis on regional cooperation, particularly in topics such as victim-centric approaches, prevention, and mental welfare, where references include both EU countries and the United Kingdom. This may indicate that in some thematic areas, training cooperation is already established or envisioned across EU and non-EU borders, especially in complex and sensitive fields requiring legal, procedural, and psychological alignment. Across topics such as investigation, identifying victims, and victim-centric methodologies, a relatively high number of countries are mentioned as potential training partners, supporting the idea that these areas are viewed as common challenges across jurisdictions and would benefit from joint learning environments. In contrast, topics such as handling encryption, financial investigations, and Artificial Intelligence saw fewer multi-country indications, possibly reflecting a more specialised or emerging nature of the training content, where national contexts, technical systems, and levels of readiness vary significantly. In summary, the data suggests that while some countries prioritise national training approaches, there is a clear regional and even transnational interest in cooperation on key topics of child sexual exploitation.

Table 7 below provides a summary of the geographical coverage of the regional training needs indications.

Table 7 - Summary of regional training needs

Country	Identifying victims	Investigation	Victim-centric approach	Prevention	Mental welfare	Handling encryption	Financial investigations	Offender management	Artificial intelligence
Austria	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Belgium	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
Croatia	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
Czechia							✓		
Estonia									✓
France	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Germany		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Hungary	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
Italy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Latvia	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓
Luxembourg	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓
Netherlands	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Poland	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Portugal	✓	✓	✓					✓	
Romania			✓	✓	✓				✓
Slovakia							✓		
Slovenia	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Spain	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Sweden	✓	✓		✓	✓				

Country	Identifying victims	Investigation	Victim-centric approach	Prevention	Mental welfare	Handling encryption	Financial investigations	Offender management	Artificial intelligence
Non-EU countries	✓ ¹⁴	✓ ¹⁵	✓ ¹⁶	✓ ¹⁷	✓ ¹⁸	✓ ¹⁹	✓ ²⁰	✓ ²¹	✓ ²²

Training dimensions for main topics

Identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation

This topic was ranked as the highest priority among all nine main topics, with 87.5% (21) of responding MS²³ placing it among their top five priorities. Among the respondents prioritising this topic, 60% represented the operational level, while the remaining were evenly divided between strategic and tactical levels, indicating a shared recognition of its importance across all organisational layers.

The questionnaire presented four subtopics under this domain, all of which were assessed as strongly relevant for future training by the respondents. The analysis indicates clear training needs across all proficiency levels and professional profiles.

Table 8 – Relevance of subtopics – Identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation

Subtopic	Relevance (%)
Detecting child abuse material: Applying tools and techniques to accurately detect illegal content	83.3%
Images and videos for victim identification purposes: Using media analysis to identify and locate victims of exploitation	82.1%
Cooperation, information exchange, and interoperability: Collaborating across organisations for effective victim identification	81.0%
Implications of AI: How does AI affect VID operations, how criminals misuse AI and how law enforcement can responsibly use AI to enhance investigations	75.0%
Analysis of Big Data: Leveraging large datasets to find patterns that can aid in victim identification	63.1%

The statistically processed data suggests a particular emphasis on training for intelligence officers, experts, and managers, especially at the practitioner and Train-the-Trainer levels. However, a closer

¹⁴ Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Timor-Leste

¹⁵ Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Timor-Leste

¹⁶ Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Timor-Leste, United Kingdom

¹⁷ United Kingdom

¹⁸ United Kingdom

¹⁹ Not specified

²⁰ Not specified

²¹ Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé e Príncipe, Timor-Leste

²² Not specified

²³ Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden (21)

look at the non-processed submission data offers a slightly more balanced view. Here, training needs appear more evenly spread across profiles and levels, with practitioner and advanced practitioner levels standing out as the most prominent.

Table 9 - Profiles and number of potential participants – Identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation

Profile/ level	Awareness	Practitioner	Advanced practitioner	Expert	TTT	Median total	Actual total
Investigators	104	312	117	52	156	741	859
Intelligence officers	91	325	52	65	1 430	1 963	586
Analysts	39	52	91	78	260	520	590
Managers	78	1 313	26	52	26	1 495	523
Prosecutors, investigative judges, magistrates	104	325	156	78	260	923	658
Experts	52	1 326	260	52	26	1 716	524
Other	0	0	520	0	0	520 ²⁴	20
Total	468	3 653	1 222	377	2 158	7 878	3 760

Investigation techniques and methodologies

Investigation techniques and methodologies were identified as a priority training area by 83.3% (n=20) of responding countries²⁵, placing the topic among their top five priorities. Of the respondents who addressed this topic, the majority (63.6%, n=21) represented the operational level, while the remainder were divided between tactical (21.2%, n=7) and strategic (15.2%, n=5) levels. All ten subtopics presented under this main topic were consistently assessed as highly relevant for training.

Table 10 - Relevance of subtopics - Investigation techniques and methodologies

Subtopic	Relevance (%)
Proactive investigation: Identifying and targeting offenders before crimes escalate	83.8%
Use of Open-Source Intelligence and the Dark Web: Leveraging open-source and dark web intelligence for investigation	82.5%
Self-generated child sexual abuse material: Addressing cases where minors produce their own abusive content under coercion	76.3%
Use of new forensic tools: Employing cutting-edge tools for digital evidence gathering	76.3%
Cooperation, Information Exchange, and Interoperability: strengthening inter-agency collaboration for efficient investigations	73.8%
Detecting child abuse material: Identifying exploitative content using forensic and digital tools	73.8%
Implications of AI: How does AI affect child sexual exploitation-related operations, how criminals misuse AI and how law enforcement can responsibly use AI to enhance investigations	72.5%

²⁴ Number of 'other' potential participants originates from Romanian submission pointing to advanced practitioner-level training of victim support officers

²⁵ Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Sweden (20)

Subtopic	Relevance (%)
Developing and applying innovative investigation methods: Adapting new methods to keep pace with evolving threats	72.5%
Online undercover operations: Conducting covert operations online to infiltrate abusive networks	71.3%
Identification of High-Risk Criminal Networks: Pinpointing organised groups engaged in exploitation	70.0%

The analysis indicates broad training needs across all professional profiles and proficiency levels. Based on the statistically processed data, particular emphasis emerges on practitioner and Train-the-Trainer levels, especially for intelligence officers, experts, and managers. However, a closer review of the raw (non-processed) data reveals slightly stronger demand for advanced practitioner and expert-level training, though all levels are represented with relatively equal weight. Similarly, training is needed across all professional categories, pointing to the cross-cutting importance of investigative competence in addressing child sexual exploitation.

Table 11 - Profiles and numbers of potential participants – Investigation techniques and methodologies

Profile/ level	Awareness	Practitioner	Advanced practitioner	Expert	TTT	Median total	Actual total
Investigators	78	286	104	104	52	624	879
Intelligence officers	130	130	156	169	1326	1911	615
Analysts	52	260	91	78	52	533	614
Managers	91	1313	26	26	26	1482	562
Prosecutors, investigative judges, magistrates	130	130	260	325	91	936	658
Experts	104	130	130	52	1365	1781	585
Other	0	0	0	26	0	26	1
Total	585	2 249	767	780	2 912	7 293	3 914

Prevention

Prevention ranked third among the nine main topics, with 62.5% (n=15) of responding MS²⁶ selecting it as one of their top five training priorities. A majority of the individual respondents (71.4%) represented the operational level, while the remainder were from the strategic level. No specific subtopics were presented under this topic, nor were additional proposals submitted by respondents. Nonetheless, several national responses included suggestions for regional training needs related to prevention, underlining the importance of fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange across countries.

In terms of potential participants, preliminary data analysis²⁷ suggests that investigators would constitute the primary target group for training in prevention-related topics, with a particular emphasis on awareness-level training. While this indicates a strong interest in foundational-level capacity-building, further insights are expected to refine the picture.

²⁶ Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden (15)

²⁷ Due to data gaps, the current view remains incomplete and is under further review.

Table 12 – Profiles and number of potential participants – Prevention

Profile/ level	Awareness	Practitioner	Advanced practitioner	Expert	TTT	Median total	Actual total
Investigators	0	520	260	26	0	806	42
Intelligence officers	0	0	0	52	0	52	4
Analysts	0	0	0	26	0	26	2
Managers	0	0	0	52	0	52	4
Prosecutors, investigative judges, magistrates	0	0	26	26	0	52	3
Experts	0	0	0	221	0	221	17
Other	13 000	0	0	0	0	13 000 ²⁸	500
Total	13 000	520	286	403	0	14 209	572

To complement the findings on prevention, a follow-up was carried out beyond the online questionnaire due to a lack of detailed information in multiple submissions concerning participant profiles and training volumes for this topic. A total of 11 respondents from ten MS²⁹ were invited for clarification interviews or written follow-ups. The additional input gathered through this process stressed the importance of proactive measures, including early intervention, cyber-prevention skills, and child safety education. The interviews further indicated that training on prevention should primarily target investigators, intelligence officers, and/or analysts. In some countries, prevention-specific police roles, such as crime prevention officers or officers working directly with schools and child protection, were identified as key target groups, even though such profiles were not included in the original questionnaire³⁰.

Additionally, some respondents mentioned that prevention activities are primarily conducted by community police units at the district level rather than by investigators, who typically focus on criminal cases after incidents occur. However, in relation to CSE prevention, it was noted that while prevention efforts in areas such as traffic safety and substance use are well established, prevention efforts specifically targeting crimes against children remain less developed. Therefore, a targeted number of practitioner-level professionals, particularly those already working on online safety and child protection issues, could benefit from dedicated training to strengthen their theoretical understanding and contextual knowledge.

As a limitation, it was also noted that resources available for participation in training among these professionals are often constrained. Furthermore, as EU-level training is typically provided in English, language barriers may impact participation rates. The clarifications reached in a relatively consistent manner suggested initial cohorts of 10 to 30 professionals per MS for EU-level training on the topic of prevention. When considered alongside the overall totals already collected through the survey, these complementary figures are broadly aligned with the estimated participation needs.

²⁸ The high number of 'other' potential participants originates from Swedish respondents, who identified a somewhat unspecified participant category described as "control" in their training needs.

²⁹ Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Sweden

³⁰ For example, a Latvian respondent emphasised the need for proactive approaches, noting that police officers in prevention departments could benefit from training focused on educating children about body safety and detecting online threats. They also called for specialist training for intelligence officers conducting online "special operational experiments" to expose offenders. Poland similarly confirmed that investigators would be the primary profile to target for prevention training, estimating an initial need for approximately 30 participants. A Swedish respondent highlighted the relevance of crime prevention officers and estimated a need for around 10 participants, acknowledging that exact figures are difficult to determine at national level.

Victim-centric approach in investigations and support services

Victim-centric approach in investigations and support services ranked fourth among the nine main topics, with 75.0% (n=18) of responding MS³¹ selecting it as one of their top five training priorities. The majority of responses came from operational-level professionals (59.3%, n=16), followed by strategic (25.9%, n=7) and tactical (14.8%, n=4) levels. All four subtopics presented under this theme were consistently considered highly relevant for training.

Table 13 - Relevance of subtopics - Victim-centric approach in investigations and support services

Subtopic	Relevance (%)
Interviewing techniques: Conducting trauma-informed interviews with sensitivity	77.8%
Prevention: Implementing strategies to prevent victimisation and reduce harm	69.4%
Cooperation, information exchange, and interoperability: Sharing information to prioritise victim welfare	68.1%
Fundamental rights and data protection: Protecting victims' privacy in investigative processes	63.9%

Training needs appear across all professional profiles and proficiency levels. Statistical processing highlights experts and managers as the most prominent target groups and suggests a focus on practitioner and awareness-level training. However, a deeper analysis of the unprocessed data offers a more nuanced picture, pointing to a broader range of training needs across proficiency levels, particularly between practitioner and expert levels. This suggests that while initial exposure to victim-centric practices is important, there is also substantial demand for more advanced and specialised training to strengthen victim-centred approaches within investigations and support structures.

Table 14 - Profiles and numbers of potential participants – Victim-centric approach in investigations and support services

Profile/ level	Awareness	Practitioner	Advanced practitioner	Expert	TTT	Median total	Actual total
Investigators	78	260	104	65	156	663	781
Intelligence officers	130	260	156	78	1326	1950	552
Analysts	104	52	52	52	1326	1586	535
Managers	1313	1313	26	52	26	2730	512
Prosecutors, investigative judges	130	130	26	130	52	468	536
Experts	1365	1365	91	78	26	2925	537
Other	0	0	260	0	0	260	20
Total	3120	3380	715	455	2912	10582	3473

Mental welfare in child sexual exploitation investigations

Mental welfare in CSE investigations ranked fifth among the main topics, selected as a top-five training priority by 66.7% (n=16) of the responding MS³². Among the individual respondents who addressed this

³¹ Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia (18)

³² Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden (16)

topic, 63% (n=17) represented the operational level, while the remainder were evenly split between strategic and tactical levels (each 18.5%, n=5). All three subtopics presented under this main topic were assessed as strongly relevant, confirming the importance of addressing mental health in the context of child sexual exploitation investigations.

Table 15 - Relevance of subtopics - Mental welfare in child sexual exploitation investigations

Subtopic	Relevance (%)
Prevention: Creating a supportive environment to mitigate psychological impact	79.7%
Tools and techniques for psychological support: Providing mental health resources for investigators and others affected by their work	78.1%
Fundamental rights and data protection: Protecting the privacy of staff working in child sexual exploitation investigations	73.4%

Regardless of the analytical method applied, investigators clearly emerged as the primary target group for training on this topic. The training demand is particularly concentrated on practitioner and advanced practitioner levels, suggesting a need for practical and in-depth capacity-building to support professionals handling emotionally complex and high-impact cases.

Table 16 - Profiles and number of potential participants - Mental welfare in child sexual exploitation investigations

Profile/ level	Awareness	Practitioner	Advanced practitioner	Expert	TTT	Median total	Actual total
Investigators	143	520	104	52	260	1079	291
Intelligence officers	26	0	0	65	0	91	9
Analysts	0	0	39	52	0	91	9
Managers	78	104	26	52	0	260	19
Prosecutors, investigative judges, magistrates	130	78	0	52	0	260	28
Experts	0	104	78	39	26	247	30
Other	0	0	520	0	0	520	20
Total	377	806	767	312	286	2548	406

Artificial Intelligence related to child sexual exploitation

AI related to child sexual exploitation ranked as the sixth main topic, closely aligned with the topic of handling encryption and anonymisation services in overall scoring. While it received a slightly higher overall rank, it was selected as a top five training priority by slightly fewer countries³³ –58.3% (n=14). Most respondents addressing this topic (66.7%, n=16) represented the operational level, with the remainder comprising strategic (25%, n=6) and tactical (8.3%, n=2) levels. All three subtopics under this domain were considered highly relevant for training, reflecting growing concerns over the role of AI technologies in facilitating or detecting online child sexual abuse.

³³ Bulgaria, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden (14)

Table 17 – Relevance of subtopics - Artificial Intelligence related to child sexual exploitation

Subtopic	Relevance (%)
Use of Artificial Intelligence by law enforcement in child sexual exploitation investigations: Deploying AI to improve investigative efficiency and precision	92.9%
Artificial Intelligence-generated child sexual abuse material: Recognising AI-generated content to adapt detection techniques	91.1%
Active law enforcement participation in training Artificial Intelligence: Understanding AI and adding valuable input to training AI models to assure quality AI assistance in investigations	91.1%

Although participant volume estimates suggest high training demand, figures are inflated due to a data outlier related to awareness-level training for unspecified "other" profiles. Once adjusted, the more realistic analysis points to investigators as the primary target group for training, with demand particularly concentrated at the awareness level.

Table 18 – Profiles and numbers of potential participants– Artificial Intelligence related to child sexual exploitation

Profile/ level	Awareness	Practitioner	Advanced practitioner	Expert	TTT	Median total	Actual total
Investigators	65	325	91	52	260	793	182
Intelligence officers	65	130	104	26	0	325	20
Analysts	104	52	26	52	0	234	16
Managers	78	78	52	52	0	260	18
Prosecutors, investigative judges	52	156	260	52	52	572	87
Experts	0	130	26	39	26	221	15
Other	13 000 ³⁴	260	0	0	0	13 260 ³⁵	510
Total	13 364	1131	559	273	338	15 665	848

Handling encryption and anonymisation services in online child sexual abuse

Handling encryption and anonymisation services in online child sexual abuse was ranked seventh, with 62.5% (n=15) of responding countries³⁶ identifying it as one of their top five training priorities. The majority of respondents addressing this topic (66.7%, n=14) represented the operational level, followed by strategic (19%, n=4) and tactical (14.3%, n=3) levels. All subtopics under this theme were assessed as highly relevant for training, reflecting the increasing complexity of encrypted communication tools and anonymisation techniques used in online child sexual abuse cases.

³⁴ The high number of 'other' potential participants originates from Swedish respondents, who identified a somewhat unspecified participant category described as "control" in their training needs.

³⁵ The high number of 'other' potential participants primarily stems from Swedish respondents who referred to a broad, unspecified category described as "control," along with Romanian submissions indicating training needs for victim support officers.

³⁶ Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Finland, France, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden (15)

Table 19 - Relevance of subtopics - Handling encryption and anonymisation services in online sexual abuse

Subtopic	Relevance (%)
VPN: Understanding how virtual private networks conceal identities in child sexual exploitation cases	78.3%
Proxy servers: Analysing proxy usage that hides online identities and locations	75.0%
Tor: Investigating the Tor network and its role in anonymous child abuse activities	73.3%
Implications of AI: How does AI affect cyberspace operations, how criminals misuse AI and how law enforcement can responsibly use AI to enhance investigations	73.3%
Cooperation, information exchange, and interoperability: Sharing expertise to address encryption challenges	70.0%

In terms of target groups, statistical analysis places particular emphasis on prosecutors, investigative judges, and magistrates. However, a closer look at the actual submissions from MS highlights investigators and intelligence officers as key segments for training. Training is especially sought at the awareness level, suggesting a broad need to familiarise operational professionals with the technical and procedural challenges involved in these types of investigations.

Table 20 - Profiles and number of potential participants – Handling encryption and anonymisation services in online sexual abuse

Profile/ level	Awareness	Practitioner	Advanced practitioner	Expert	TTT	Median total	Actual total
Investigators	78	52	104	195	26	455	125
Intelligence officers	91	156	156	52	52	507	80
Analysts	52	156	156	52	52	468	55
Managers	52	52	52	52	0	208	11
Prosecutors, investigative judges, magistrates	130	689	104	91	26	1 040	93
Experts	130	130	130	78	0	468	36
Other	13 000	0	0	0	0	13 000 ³⁷	500
Total	13 533	123	702	520	156	16 146	900

Financial investigations related to child sexual exploitation cases

Financial investigations related to child sexual exploitation cases ranked as the eighth main topic, identified as a top five training priority by 58.3% of responding countries³⁸ (n=14). Most respondents addressing this topic (66.7%, n=14) represented the operational level, with smaller shares from tactical (19%, n=4) and strategic (14.3%, n=3) levels. All subtopics linked to this area were considered strongly relevant for training.

³⁷ The high number of 'other' potential participants originates from Swedish respondents, who identified a somewhat unspecified participant category described as "control" in their training needs.

³⁸ Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, France, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden (14)

Table 21 - Relevance of subtopics - Financial investigations related to child sexual exploitation cases

Subtopic	Relevance (%)
Online payment methods, including virtual currencies: Tracing payments to track financial flows in child sexual exploitation activities, including cryptocurrencies but also other forms of online/virtual payment methods	73.2%
Cooperation, information exchange, and interoperability: Partnering across sectors for financial intelligence	73.2%
Implications of Artificial Intelligence: How can law enforcement responsibly use AI to enhance financial investigations	71.4%

According to the statistical analysis, prosecutors, investigative judges, and magistrates constitute the largest projected training group. However, a deeper review of actual country submissions highlights investigators as the most frequently referred profile. In terms of proficiency levels, training is primarily requested at the practitioner level, with consistent demand also observed for expert and advanced practitioner-level training, underscoring the need for both foundational and specialised financial investigation skills.

Table 22 - Profiles and numbers of potential participants – Financial investigations related to child sexual exploitation cases

Profile/ level	Awareness	Practitioner	Advanced practitioner	Expert	TTT	Median total	Actual total
Investigators	91	130	130	130	52	533	128
Intelligence officers	78	130	156	78	52	494	62
Analysts	26	260	52	260	52	650	44
Managers	0	26	26	39	0	91	7
Prosecutors, investigative judges, magistrates	65	689	130	130	26	1040	93
Experts	0	130	78	130	0	338	43
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	260	1365	572	767	182	3146	377

Offender management

Offender management remained the lowest-ranked main topic across all methods of assessment, identified as a top-five training priority by 41.7% (n=10) of responding MS³⁹. A large majority of responses (78.9%, n=15) came from operational-level professionals, with the remainder split evenly between strategic and tactical levels (10.5% each, n=2). All subtopics under this theme were considered relevant for training.

Table 23 - Relevance of subtopics - Offender management

Subtopic	Relevance (%)
Risk assessment: Evaluating offender profiles to manage future risks	70.0%
Prevention: Establishing offender intervention programmes to prevent recidivism	70.0%

³⁹ Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, France, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia (10)

Subtopic	Relevance (%)
Cooperation, information exchange, and interoperability: Exchanging information for tracking offenders	77.5%
Fundamental rights and data protection: Respecting offenders' rights within lawful constraints	55.0%

While the statistical analysis highlights Train-the-Trainer and practitioner-level training as the most in-demand, this outcome is strongly influenced by data outliers. Specifically, one or more countries reported stable, repeated participant numbers for every possible profile and level. When extrapolated to the EU level, such uniform entries likely distort the actual demand across countries and do not offer a fully accurate estimate. In contrast, the raw, non-processed submissions present a more nuanced picture: training needs appear widely distributed with minimal variation between levels or profiles, suggesting that capacity gaps exist across the board and that training should be offered in a flexible and inclusive manner.

Table 24 - Profiles and numbers of potential participants – Offender management

Profile/ level	Awareness	Practitioner	Advanced practitioner	Expert	TTT	Median total	Actual total
Investigators	260	260	169	156	260	1105	721
Intelligence officers	52	1326	39	52	2 600	4 069	515
Analysts	52	2 600	26	52	2 600	5 330	510
Managers	1326	2 600	26	52	2 600	6 604	508
Prosecutors, investigative	1378	2 600	26	78	2 600	6 682	512
Experts	2 600	2 600	52	1326	2 600	9 178	506
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	5 668	11 986	338	1 716	13 260⁴⁰	32 968	3 272

While the topic of offender management received the lowest prioritisation among the main topics ranked based on the OTNA questionnaire data, one of the interviews conducted offered a complementary insight, reflecting that in many EU countries, law enforcement tends to be more advanced in victim management compared to working with suspects, even though both aspects are closely interconnected and still developing. Although offender management is not always primarily the responsibility of law enforcement agencies, this dimension remains important and should not be overlooked when considering comprehensive capacity-building efforts.

⁴⁰ The high number of potential participants at the Train-the-Trainer level is largely influenced by a single-country submission from Portugal, which indicated a consistent estimate of 100 participants across all listed profiles and proficiency levels.

Outcomes of Expert Group Meeting

Following the distribution of the draft OTNA report, a group of subject matter experts convened virtually on 3 April 2025, to review and validate the findings of the analysis on law enforcement training needs related to child sexual exploitation, and to consider how these needs can be best addressed through EU-level training initiatives.

The meeting began with a presentation summarising the key OTNA results, after which the group engaged in an exchange of views regarding the findings. There was **broad agreement on the prioritisation of the main thematic areas identified through the OTNA**. The topics that emerged as the most critical - namely, identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, investigation techniques and methodologies, prevention, victim-centric approaches in investigations and support services, and mental welfare in CSE investigations - were generally considered relevant and fully aligned with broader EU threat frameworks and policy priorities. Experts also recognised the **increasingly central role of technological development** in this crime area. AI, in particular, was acknowledged as a rapidly evolving factor both in the exploitation of victims and in law enforcement responses, and it was agreed that its elements run across multiple CSE-related topics in a cross-cutting manner. Also, the **prioritisation of prevention as one of the top five training areas was positively received by the expert group, as it reflects a broader and evolving understanding of the need for proactive, multidisciplinary approaches** to effectively address the challenges posed by CSE.

While the expert group supported the OTNA findings and their alignment with strategic EU-level priorities, the limitations of the data collection methodology were also discussed. As with other OTNA processes, the survey was distributed via CNUOs, who were tasked with identifying suitable respondents at the national level. Although the overall response included respondents primarily (66%) from the operational level, it was questioned whether this sample could sufficiently represent the wider training needs across all EU MS. It was highlighted that more than 70% of operational-level respondents were actively or regularly involved in CSE investigations, but **concerns remained about the limited scale and scope of the outreach**. In light of this, some experts pointed out that the topic of CSE warrants further and more in-depth research using field-based data collection methods capable of reaching a broader respondent base, ideally including hundreds or even thousands of frontline practitioners, enabling a more granular understanding of real-world training needs. While conducting such a study would fall outside the current OTNA's scope and methodology, as well as remains outside the mandate of a single OTNA process to recommend a specific iteration, CEPOL and other EU-level actors are encouraged to explore the possibility of launching a broader, complementary assessment, e.g., an extraordinary training needs assessment or a specialised thematic review on training in the CSE domain, resources permitting. It was discussed that the timing of any future OTNA on CSE will depend on a range of factors, including the updated priorities set out in the forthcoming EU-STNA cycle. If CSE is again identified as a strategic training domain, it could be revisited in future OTNAs under CEPOL's regular OTNA framework.

The expert group also reflected on how to translate the identified training needs into concrete training responses within CEPOL's portfolio. It was recommended that **victim identification training be reinforced and expanded** to include more advanced modules, particularly those focusing on international and cross-border aspects. In parallel, **undercover investigation capabilities should be strengthened through scenario-based training and instruction tailored to legal frameworks**. A **Train-the-Trainer course** was also proposed, with its foundation rooted in the second priority area, **investigation techniques and methodologies**, and **specific reference to basic COSEC modules** as a core curriculum element. The experts further emphasised the importance of **systematically**

integrating cross-cutting themes such as AI and staff well-being across all CSE-related training. Similarly, wellness-related content is currently offered via CEPOL webinars and was considered important to maintain as part of the broader training offer. Finally, the importance of international cooperation was underlined, with particular reference to continuing coordination with existing initiatives such as the SIRIUS project, which supports data access and operational collaboration across borders.

Conclusions

Addressing child sexual abuse and exploitation, both online and offline, is a priority under the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats⁴¹ (EMPACT) 2022–2025 framework and one of the strategic EU-level training priorities set by the EU EU-STNA 2022–2025. The EU-STNA identified urgent training needs in several key areas, including victim identification, detection of child sexual abuse material, the use of online investigation tools, management of electronic evidence, digital forensics, and financial investigation techniques. It also underscored the importance of training related to children’s rights, the mental well-being of investigators, and prevention, particularly through awareness-raising and structured prevention planning. Recently, the European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment⁴² (SOCTA) reaffirmed that (online) child sexual exploitation remains a severe and high-impact crime, involving both physical and psychological harm to children, with long-term effects on their health and development, also reiterating the growing concern about the role of online environments in enabling and fuelling these crimes.

Building on these grounds, CEPOL conducted this OTNA to explore the training needs in greater detail, presenting nine topics for assessment. All topics received notable attention. However, the analysis suggests that **EU-level training efforts should prioritise the following five areas: identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, investigation techniques and methodologies, prevention, victim-centric approach in investigations and support services, and mental welfare in child sexual exploitation investigations.**

While the role of AI in CSE did not rank among the top five standalone training topics, its integration across multiple subtopics highlights its growing importance. Specifically, AI’s role in law enforcement operations and its misuse by offenders were identified as highly relevant under both victim identification and investigation techniques. Considering the accelerating use of generative AI in the production and dissemination of child sexual abuse material, as well as its potential to obstruct investigations through advanced anonymisation and encryption, the Expert Group supporting the OTNA process suggested that **AI should be incorporated as a central element across all relevant CSE-related training.** Similarly, although the standalone topic of handling encryption and anonymisation services in online child sexual abuse did not receive a top priority ranking, the underlying need it represents is closely linked to the broader domain of investigation techniques and methodologies, which emerged as one of the most critical training priorities. Addressing the digital aspects of investigations remains essential, particularly in light of rapidly evolving technologies, the widespread use of encrypted platforms, and the transnational nature of online offending networks. Strengthening law enforcement capabilities in digital forensics, online investigation skills, and cross-border cooperation will be vital for effectively countering increasingly sophisticated offender tactics and protecting children in the digital environment.

Training on child sexual exploitation topics is generally considered urgent, indicating that training should ideally be delivered within a one-year period to ensure operational readiness. Again, while with less overall priority, particularly the topic of AI in combatting CSE emerged as especially urgent among respondents who prioritised it, underlining the need for rapid capacity-building in this evolving area.

In terms of demand, the **total number of officials requiring training on the five highest-ranked topics is estimated to exceed 42 500.** The most participant-intensive areas appear to be prevention and victim-centric approaches, though this is partly influenced by high-volume responses from a limited number of countries. The OTNA suggests that **investigators consistently emerge as a key target group** across most training topics, especially in prevention and mental welfare.

⁴¹ Available on: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas-and-statistics/empact>

⁴² Available on: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/EU-SOCTA-2025.pdf>

For topics like identifying victims and investigation techniques, both statistical and non-statistical data point to broad demand across profiles. Victim-centric approaches also reveal strong training needs across professional profiles. Statistical data suggests a greater focus on experts and managers, while the broader data underlines demand across all categories, including prosecutors, frontline officers, and support personnel.

In terms of proficiency level, the training needs show strong topic-specific patterns, with **practitioner and advanced practitioner level being most prevalent**. For identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, demand appears across all levels, with particular emphasis on practitioner and advanced practitioner levels. For investigation techniques, the need shifts further toward advanced practitioner and expert levels, underlining the requirement for highly specialised skill sets. In the area of victim-centric approaches, needs are again distributed across all proficiency levels, with a concentration from practitioner to expert, reflecting the broad relevance of victim-centred competence. For mental welfare in CSE investigations, the demand centres on the advanced practitioner level, mirroring the emotional and psychological complexity of the subject. Meanwhile, training needs on prevention are concentrated at the awareness level, focusing on foundational understanding and outreach capabilities.

On the topic of **prevention**, prevention-specific police roles, such as **crime prevention officers** and officers working directly with schools and child protection, as well as community police units responsible for carrying out prevention activities, were identified as segments that **would also benefit from training**, particularly in areas **related to online safety and child protection**. However, it was also noted that while the need for training is recognised among some countries' hands-on officials, **participation in EU-level training may be constrained by language barriers** and to address this, **EU-level efforts could consider developing common training materials and facilitating their dissemination through translated versions in the national languages** of the MS, improving accessibility and reach of capacity development efforts of strengthening proactive measures to address risks before they materialise.

The indication of various levels and profiles across all topics suggests a **need for a multi-tiered training portfolio**. Distribution of human resources dedicated to combat child sexual exploitation is uneven across EU Member States which is reflected in the training available on national level for law enforcement officials. While in some MS training covers all topics on different proficiency levels, others indicated training in only one or two areas, often limited to awareness level. Therefore, **EU training providers should aim to address the full spectrum of professionals at practitioner and higher proficiency levels** in most areas. This would ensure that officials in various roles and at different stages of professional development can build their necessary skills and knowledge.

Layered learning paths could help maximise learning outcomes and ensure continuity in competence development. To make training delivery effective and efficient, **consideration should be given to modular design, the use of blended or hybrid formats**, and the integration of **scenario-based and peer-learning approaches**, particularly in highly sensitive topics. To support this, training content should be relevant to specific professional profiles, with modules adapted for investigators, intelligence officers, digital forensics experts, prosecutors, and managers, depending on the focus area. Additionally, several themes emerged as consistently relevant, regardless of the main topic. **Elements such as AI applications and risks, interoperability, and fundamental rights, particularly of victims and children, should be embedded across training content.**



Annexes



Annex 1 – CEPOL EU-STNA Chapter on Child Sexual Exploitation

Environmental challenges

Online child sexual exploitation has been on the rise over the past few years, and the COVID-19 outbreak has led to a considerable increase in criminal activity due to children's increased use of the internet, often without parental supervision. It is imperative to strengthen the investigative capacity of law enforcement in this crime area, as, at present, the number of cases far surpasses the resources available. On top of this, the overburdening of officials tends to result in early burnout since it is difficult to cope with the psychological aspects of cases. Besides human capacity, Member States need adequate equipment, such as high-tech software and hardware, in order to detect criminal activities and manage e-evidence so that it can be presented in court.

Furthermore, legislative differences hinder efficient cross-border cooperation. There are gaps in national laws and regulations on web hosting and data retention. The legislation also needs improvement in the area of protecting children against sexual exploitation and abuse, including as regards the requirement for relevant online service providers to detect online child sexual exploitation and report it to authorities.

Challenges concerning knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy, and related training needs

(a) Challenges

Law enforcement officials face difficulties in identifying and working with child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. This is partly because offenders frequently use grooming techniques and blackmail children. Child sexual offenders are problematic to detect and prosecute due to various factors. They often use fake identities, encryption and anonymous VPN services, proxy servers and the dark web, which makes it easier to hide criminal activities. Furthermore, they opt for password-protected storage services, where the hosting providers are not necessarily aware of the content stored. To pay for different services along the criminal chain, offenders use online payment methods and virtual currencies. In order to tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation, investigators should be equipped with high-tech software and hardware as well as an excellent ability to use digital investigation tools and methods, including online undercover operations and digital forensics. Moreover, law enforcement must also be trained in the specificities of investigations dealing with child sexual abuse. In reality, the capacity of law enforcement remains low; there is a considerable lack of sufficiently trained investigators. Detecting child sexual abuse material, analysing big data and combatting anonymisation are skills that need improvement. The use of digital tools and new technology by the judiciary should also be enhanced. Cooperation at the national and international levels is an issue. Besides the legislative obstacles described above, officials are not always aware of the international nature of the crime area and thus limit their focus to national investigation. Law enforcement and the judiciary should be better acquainted with existing international cooperation mechanisms, such as joint investigation teams and

information and evidence exchange tools. Cooperation with the judiciary, as well as with NGOs, needs improvement at the national level.

Given that child sexual abuse involves harassment, systematic abuse, and verbal, psychological and physical violence towards children, it can be psychologically challenging for law enforcement officials. Investigators need regular mental health and psychological support while in this job. In addition, they should be familiar with child-friendly investigation techniques to deal with traumatised children and have solid knowledge of children's rights and children's welfare. Law enforcement officials should be aware of their role in preventing child sexual exploitation as well as their role in supporting the design and implementation of prevention programmes targeting parents, children, teachers and offenders.

(b) Training needs

Summary

The highest priority in terms of training is related to victim identification and the detection of child sexual abuse and exploitation material. Training is also needed on online investigation tools, alternative investigation techniques, the management of e-evidence, and the use of digital forensic tools. Cooperation at national and international levels can be enhanced through joint training activities with the participation of law enforcement officials and the judiciary, as well as through sharing best practices. In addition, training on financial investigation techniques and the identification of high-risk criminal networks is also necessary. Furthermore, officials need training related to the fundamental rights aspects of investigating child sexual abuse and exploitation cases, with a special focus on dealing with children and children's rights. In addition, as cases are psychologically challenging, investigators should receive training on the support tools available to preserve their mental health. Awareness raising is key to preventing child sexual exploitation. Training should focus on the full concept of prevention, more precisely on how to design and carry out effective prevention activities from idea to execution (planning, clear and structured messages, the inclusion of stakeholders, the use of communication channels, types of audience, risk and change management, measuring impact and outreach) as well as on the protection of children's rights. Member States indicated that 6 192 officials need training in this area.

Further details

The most relevant topics in terms of training include the identification of victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation (including, inter alia, the analysis of big data, videos and images for the purpose of victim identification) and the detection of child sexual abuse and exploitation material. In addition, officials need training on developing and applying innovative investigation methods, including online investigation tools, the use of open-source intelligence and online undercover investigations, as well as digital forensics. This latter topic should cover the management of digital evidence throughout the entire process of investigating and prosecuting, including the presentation of e-evidence in court and the international dimensions of admissibility of e-evidence. Dealing with the challenges posed by encryption and anonymisation services used by offenders, such as VPNs, proxy servers and Tor, should also be among the training topics, as for the development and application of innovative investigation approaches, training courses such as Combatting the Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (COSEC) should be used. Furthermore, training on international cooperation tools and mechanisms, such as joint investigation teams, is necessary. In general, it should raise awareness of the importance of cross-border cooperation and focus on sharing best practices for successful international investigation. Training should also touch upon good cooperation mechanisms at the national level, with a special focus on those operating between the judiciary and law enforcement. It would be advisable to organise joint training activities for law enforcement and the judiciary. Officials investigating child sexual abuse and exploitation cases should also receive training on how offenders use online payment methods, including virtual currencies. In addition, training on the structure and operation of high-risk criminal networks

would be helpful. Law enforcement officials' knowledge of gender-related cyber violence against women and girls, as well as of the rights of victims, suspects and offenders, also requires improvement through training. In addition, officials need to learn about the psychological tools and techniques that can support their mental health while they are dealing with child sexual abuse and exploitation. Training on offender management is also considered a priority, with a focus on the difficulties encountered in handling offenders, ways of overcoming legal, procedural and other obstacles, and relapse risk assessment. Training should provide an opportunity to share best practices and experiences related to offender management, including maintaining registries and disclosure policies, monitoring for relapse, risk assessment, managing cross-border travel, and working with other agencies.

List of identified and prioritised training needs

Identifying victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, analysis of big data, images and videos for victim identification purposes; detecting child abuse material
Investigation: detecting child abuse material; use of new forensic tools; online undercover operations
Use of OSINT and the dark web
Developing and applying innovative investigation methods
Handling encryption and anonymisation services in online child sexual abuse (VPNs, proxy servers, Tor)
Law enforcement cooperation to tackle child sexual exploitation and abuse cases; joint investigation teams; cooperation between law enforcement and judicial authorities to tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation
Financial investigations related to child sexual exploitation cases (online payment methods, including virtual currencies)
Identification of high-risk criminal networks involved in child sexual abuse and exploitation
Tackling gender-related cyber violence against women and girls
Tools and techniques for mental health/psychological support for law enforcement officers dealing with child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation
Child victims' rights, offenders' rights, suspects' rights
International offender management

Annex 2 - Urgency levels

Urgency in the context of this questionnaire refers to the criticality of timely training intervention and its impact on operational performance.

Urgency scale level	1	2	3	4	5
Training need is	Low	Secondary	Moderate	Urgent	Crucial
Training impact	Training has a minor role in the performance boost, it would refresh the knowledge, officials could benefit from training, and however, it is not essential.	It would be useful if the training would be delivered, however, the need is not urgent. Training can be delivered in (predictable) 2-3 years' time, it is needed to stay updated.	It would be advantageous to receive training within a year's period, it would improve the performance, however, not significantly.	Training is essential, it is necessary to be delivered within a year's period, it is important to perform qualitatively.	Training is critical, it is necessary as soon as possible, it is crucial for the successful performance of duties.

Annex 3 – Proficiency levels

	Level 1 – Awareness	Level 2 – Practitioner	Level 3 – Advanced Practitioner	Level 4 – Expert	Level 5 – Train-the-trainer
Definition	Refers to those who only need an insight into the particular topic, they do not need specific skills, competences and knowledge to perform the particular tasks, however they require general information in order to be able to efficiently support the practitioners working in that particular field.	Refers to those who independently perform their everyday standard duties in the area of the particular topic.	Has increased knowledge, skills and competences in the particular topic because of extended experience, or a specific function/role, i.e., team/unit leader.	Has additional competences, highly specialised knowledge and skills. Is at the forefront of knowledge in the particular topic.	Officials who are to be used as trainers for staff
Description	Has a general factual and theoretical understanding of what the topic is about, understands basic concepts, principles, facts and processes, and is familiar with the terminology and standard predictable situations. Has a duty to contribute to the performance of practitioners in the particular field.	Has a good working knowledge of the topic, is able to apply the knowledge in the daily work and does not require any specific guidance in standard situations. Has knowledge of possible situation deviations and can apply necessary skills in practice. Can assist in solution development for abstract problems. Is aware of the limits of their knowledge and skills, is motivated to develop their self-performance.	Has broad and in-depth knowledge, skills and competences including a critical understanding of theories and principles. Is able to operate in conditions of uncertainty, manage extraordinary situations and special cases independently, solve complex and unpredictable problems, direct the work of others. Is able to share their knowledge with and provide guidance to less experienced colleagues. Is able to discuss issues with a sceptical colleague, counter sophisticated denialist opinions and arguments for inaction.	Has extensive knowledge, skills and competences, is able to link the processes to other competency areas and assess the interface as a whole. Is able to provide tailored advice with valid argumentation. Is able to innovate, develop new procedures and integrate knowledge from different fields. Is (fully or partially) responsible for policy development and strategic performance in the particular area.	Has the knowledge and skills to organise training and appropriate learning environment using modern adult training methods and blended learning techniques. Is familiar with and can apply different theories, factors and processes of learning in challenging situations. Experienced with different methods and techniques of learning. Can prepare and conduct at least one theoretical and one practical training session for law enforcement officials.
EQF equivalent	EQF Level 3-4	EQF Level 5	EQF Level 6	EQF Level 7	

EQF levels – Descriptors of defining levels in the European Qualifications Framework, more information is available at <https://europa.eu/europass/en/description-eight-efq-levels>



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