EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR COMMUNICATIONS NETWORKS, CONTENT AND TECHNOLOGY

Data
Accessibility, Multilingualism and Safer Internet

Report

Public Consultation on the Action Plan against Cyberbullying

1. Executive Summary

Cyberbullying represents a growing threat to safety, mental health, and social inclusion in digital environments. In line with the Political Guidelines, the Commission is launching in early 2026 an Action Plan against cyberbullying to firmly combat the growing trend of abusive behaviour online.

This Action plan will focus primarily on minors, while also considering other aspects of cyberbullying. In particular, the enhanced vulnerability of certain groups of young people up to 29-years-old, such as girls and women, persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ+, migrants and those from religious, racial or ethnic minorities will also be addressed

To inform the preparation of the Action Plan the European Commission launched a public consultation between 22 July and 29 September 2025 to identify prevalence, impacts, and potential policy responses to cyberbullying within the EU.

This report summarises its findings. A total of **293 responses** were received from **24 EU Member States**, representing individuals, organisations, public authorities, and private entities.

Most respondents were **educators (29%)**, **parents (18%)**, and **young adults aged 18–29 (13%)**, ensuring broad demographic representation. There was strong consensus that **education, prevention, and support mechanisms** must operate alongside **legal and institutional accountability**.

Key themes emerging from the consultation include:

- **91%** identified threatening or insulting messages as the most common form of cyberbullying, **66%** noted identity-based harassment, and **55%** mentioned non-consensual sharing of private information.

- **Teenagers aged 13–17** were viewed as the most affected age group (**92%**), followed by **children under 13 (44%)**.

- **Girls and women (65%)**, **minors (60%)**, and **LGBTIQ+ individuals (56%)** were seen as most vulnerable.

- **70%** supported a **common EU definition** to improve consistency in laws and enforcement.

- Respondents emphasised a joint approach involving **schools, online platforms, parents, mental-health professionals**, and **legal actors**.

Overall, the consultation highlighted the need to:

- establish an EU framework with a common definition of cyberbullying at its core.
- propose measures to enhance prevention, awareness raising and empowerment
- making reporting easier and further support victims.

2. Introduction and Methodology

The questionnaire was accessible in three formats (standard online, accessible Word, easy-to-read). The consultation used both **closed multiple choice and open-ended questions**, providing quantitative data and qualitative insight.

3. Overview of Respondents

A total of **293 responses** came from **24 countries**, with the largest groups being:

- **Teachers/educators:** 29% (84 individuals)

- **Parents/guardians:** 18% (53)

- **Young adults (18–29):** 13% (37)

- **Adults without children:** 11% (31)

Geographically, most responses came from **Portugal (18%)**, **Italy (13%)**, **Belgium (7%)**, **Greece (7%)**, and **Germany (6%)**.

By age, **65%** were aged **30–59**, **15%** were **18–29**, **9%** were **60+**, and **4%** were **minors (16–17)**. This diversity provided a broad cross-section of views from both professionals and citizens.

4. Key Findings on Cyberbullying Perceptions

- **Forms of Cyberbullying**

The most recognised behaviour was **sending threatening, insulting, or hurtful messages (91%)**, followed by **identity-based harassment (66%)**, **spreading false information (59%)**, and **sharing private information or images without consent (55%)**. **17%** identified online exclusion as cyberbullying. Respondents also mentioned stalking, impersonation, and repeated unsolicited contact, reflecting the diverse nature of online abuse.

- **Age and Groups Most Affected**

Cyberbullying is primarily perceived as a youth issue: **92%** identified **teenagers (13–17)** as most targeted, **44%** children under 13, and **37%** young adults. Only **4%** cited those aged 30–59 and **1%** those 60+.

The groups viewed as most vulnerable were **girls/women (65%)**, **minors (60%)**, and **LGBTIQ+ people (56%)**. Respondents also noted high risk among **ethnic minorities (29%)**, **persons with disabilities (27%)**, and **people with a migration background (17%)**.

- **Common EU Definition**

Support for an EU-wide definition was overwhelming: **70%** agreed it would ensure consistent laws and enforcement, **55%** said it would raise awareness, **46%** believed it would assist educators, and **42%** noted it would facilitate data comparison. Only **1%** opposed the idea.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Perpetrators**

Key motivations identified were **power or control (70%)**, **anonymity or lack of accountability (59%)**, **anger or revenge (47%)**, and **attention-seeking (46%)**. Other cited causes included **lack of awareness (41%)**, **peer pressure (35%)**, and **stereotypes or misinformation (38%)**.

The top prevention measure was **awareness and education programmes (75%)**, followed by **stricter platform moderation (59%)**, **parental guidance (50%)**, and **public awareness campaigns (41%)**.

Preferred responses to perpetrators included **clear consequences (68%)**, **legal or disciplinary measures (67%)**, **counselling (58%)**, and **platform suspension (54%)**, reflecting a balanced call for accountability and rehabilitation.

- **Victims**

Effective support measures included **clear reporting options (55%)**, **counselling (52%)**, **family support (45%)**, and **legal advice or peer networks (39%)**.

To the question "How can victims of cyberbullying be empowered to report incidents and seek support?" respondents emphasised that **visible action after reporting (65%)** and **anonymous reporting options (59%)** are crucial to encourage disclosure.

Mental health impacts were widely recognised: **74%** cited lowered self-esteem, **63%** anxiety, and **52%** isolation or self-harm thoughts. **45%** mentioned depression, and **31%** poor school performance, underlining the need for integrated mental health and educational support.

- **Bystanders**

Barriers to intervention included **fear of becoming a target (70%)**, **uncertainty on how to help (56%)**, and **belief that it is not their responsibility (48%)**. Encouragement strategies prioritised **education and support (37%)** and **mandatory awareness participation (34%)**, with respondents favouring empowerment over punishment.

6. Support and Reporting Mechanisms

- **Reporting**

To facilitate safer reporting, **71%** supported **accessible and age-appropriate tools**, and **48%** called for **protection from retaliation**. Training for **educators and youth workers (48%)**, **peer involvement (44%)**, and **child participation in system design (36%)** were also endorsed.

- **Comprehensive Support**

Respondents highlighted the need for collaboration among multiple actors:

- **Psychologists/counsellors (74%)**,
- **Parents and guardians (70%)**,
- **Teachers/school staff (69%)**,
- **Law enforcement (56%)**,
- **Social workers (43%)**, and
- **NGOs (28%)**.

Barriers to effective support included **lack of coordination between services (65%)**, **limited awareness of available help (63%)**, **fear or stigma (57%)**, and **unclear legal frameworks (51%)**. Funding shortages and accessibility barriers for youth with disabilities were also noted.

- **Monitoring and Data**

Respondents prioritised **transparency and cooperation in case handling (61%)**, **standardised frameworks across Member States (56%)**, and **clear evaluation indicators (53%)**. **Disaggregated data (40%)** and **regular publication (39%)** were also valued. **60%** supported collaboration with platforms for data sharing, and **54%** favoured confidential self-reporting through online tools.

7. Policy and Legislative Perspectives

- **Role of Online Platforms**

Respondents expect online platforms to adopt **user-friendly and child-friendly reporting systems (63%), zero-tolerance policies (62%)**, and **stricter moderation (58%)**. In terms of what measures could encourage collaboration between online platforms and other

stakeholders to address cyberbullying, **53%** wanted proactive detection tools, while **67%** called for partnerships with **Safer Internet Centres**.

- **Role of Schools and Universities**

Schools were seen as central to prevention. Effective actions include **awareness campaigns (60%)**, **parental involvement (58%)**, **digital safety workshops (53%)**, and **peer mentoring (47%)**. With regards to the initiatives that schools and universities should implement to prevent and address cyberbullying, priorities include **teacher training (59%)**, **anti-bullying policies (54%)**, and **curriculum integration (42%)**.

- **Support to Parents**

A majority (**66%**) believe most parents are not well equipped to support children facing cyberbullying. To address this, respondents recommended **counselling and helplines (53%)**, **school-based parental engagement (54%)**, and **educational resources and workshops (49%)**. Tools for online monitoring (**41%**) and **community seminars (41%)** were also valued.

- **EU-Wide Initiatives**

The most supported EU measure was establishing **minimum binding rules criminalising cyberbullying (64%)**, followed by an **EU-wide reporting system (52%)** and **harmonised definition (47%)**.

For supporting Member States, respondents prioritised **training for teachers, law enforcement, and social workers (62%)**, **funding for prevention programmes (49%)**, and **exchange of good practices (44%)**.

Enhanced collaboration between **Safer Internet Centres and national governments (46%)**, increased **funding for helplines (42%)**, and **knowledge sharing (40%)** were also proposed.

8. General comments

Open-ended input views cyberbullying as a **systemic social problem** requiring unified EU action, strong enforcement, and educational reform centred on empathy and prevention.

- **Need of a definition:** There is a clear call for an EU-wide definition distinguishing **deliberate harm from unintentional misinformation**, alongside consistency in laws and enforcement.
- **Vulnerability:** While recognizing that anyone can be a victim, participants underscored the **intersectionality of vulnerabilities**, particularly among groups

who may be **constrained by social norms** (e.g., in reporting incidents) or who otherwise **deviate from typical social expectations**.

- **Causes:** The drivers are complex, involving intertwined **psychological, social, and technological factors** (e.g., insecurity, lack of empathy, social inequality, and online disinhibition).
- **Solutions:** Prevention focuses on **early empathy education**, robust **law enforcement**, **platform accountability**, and accessible reporting that guarantees anonymity and visible consequences.
- **Impacts:** Mental health consequences are severe, ranging from insecurity and exhaustion to **suicidal thoughts**, often worsened by a lack of accountability and bystander inaction.

9. Conclusion

The consultation demonstrates a clear and urgent public demand for coordinated EU action against cyberbullying. Respondents view it as a pervasive, cross-border problem that disproportionately affects **youth, women, and minority groups**, requiring **education, prevention, and strong accountability**.

A **common EU definition** and **harmonised framework** are widely supported as foundations for consistent policy and enforcement. Stakeholders emphasise the shared responsibility of **schools, online platforms, parents, and mental health professionals** in fostering safe digital environments.

Key priorities include:

- Accessible and confidential **reporting mechanisms**;

- Integrated **psychological and legal support** for victims;

- Comprehensive **training and awareness campaigns**;

- Effective **platform accountability** and **cross-sector cooperation**.

The feedback gathered provides a solid base for the Commission's forthcoming *Action Plan Against Cyberbullying*.