# Irish teachers call for urgent action to protect children from harmful online content



Children as young as eight across Ireland are being routinely exposed to harmful and distressing online content, according to concerns raised at the recent Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO) annual congress. Educators highlighted the significant emotional impact this exposure is having on young students, with teachers witnessing anxiety and emotional withdrawal among pupils in classrooms.

The INTO adopted a resolution at the congress calling for urgent government intervention to protect children from damaging digital environments. The union is demanding accountability from social media companies for their failure to safeguard young users and is pressing for enforceable standards including age verification measures, alongside proper funding for regulatory bodies.

Last September, the organisation CyberSafeKids published a report revealing that 65% of children aged eight to twelve in Ireland had been contacted online by strangers. The report also found that a quarter of these children experienced negative impacts arising from harmful material such as scams, harassment, horror imagery, and sexually explicit content. Similar numbers reported distress due to unsolicited and unwanted online contact.

At the INTO conference, members spoke of the distress experienced by children with some exhibiting severe emotional reactions. The union emphasised the need for engagement not only with policymakers but also with parents to address the issue comprehensively.

Annmarie Conway, representative of the INTO Central Executive Committee, stated, “We are no longer dealing with hypothetical risks. This is real harm, happening to real children, right now. Platforms that present themselves as family-friendly are routinely exposing children to the very worst the internet has to offer. We have a duty to protect them. And if tech companies and governments won’t act fast enough, we will not stay silent.”

John Boyle, general secretary of INTO, criticised regulatory bodies in Ireland and Europe for lagging behind in implementing effective safeguards. “Social media giants, emboldened by an increasingly hands-off approach to moderation, motivated by recent developments at X/Twitter, have prioritised engagement metrics over user safety,” he said. Reflecting the union’s concerns, INTO made the decision to leave X (formerly Twitter) last year due to declining standards and a failure to protect users from abuse.

Boyle outlined the union’s commitment to expanding the campaign for online child safety beyond educational settings, stating, “This is not just a tech issue, it’s a child protection issue. And we will treat it as such.” He emphasised the importance of collaboration among educators, parents, policymakers, and communities in pushing for meaningful reform.

Gavan Duffy of the INTO’s Derry branch, who proposed the motion, noted that dialogue around internet legislation, especially regarding children’s online access, was increasing and would be a critical focus in Ireland. “That the INTO should have a view on such an important issue to our children, our schools and our society is self-evident,” he said.

The INTO’s resolution and public statements underscore mounting concerns in Ireland about the safety of children in digital spaces and the responsibilities of social media companies and regulators in addressing these challenges.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/children-as-young-as-eight-exposed-to-disturbing-and-damaging-online-content-1754729.html> - This article corroborates that children as young as eight in Ireland are routinely exposed to harmful and distressing online content, and that teachers are witnessing emotional distress among students. It also confirms the INTO's resolution demanding government action and accountability from social media companies, including calls for enforceable standards and age verification measures.
2. <https://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/82-per-cent-of-children-have-unsupervised-access-to-phones-research-shows-1728522.html> - This research from CyberSafeKids supports the claim that a high percentage of children aged eight to twelve have unsupervised access to phones and smart devices, increasing their risk of exposure to harmful content and contact from strangers.
3. <https://www.into.ie/2025/04/09/into-welcomes-report-on-childrens-online-safety/> - This INTO page highlights concerns about children's exposure to harmful online content in Ireland, including cyberbullying and explicit material, reinforcing the union's focus on the emotional impact on children and the need for protective actions.
4. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1282007/children-ireland-exposure-harmful-online-content/> - The Statista data provides statistics on Irish children's exposure to various types of harmful online content, such as hate messages and violent imagery, which supports the claims made about the types of distressing material children encounter online.
5. <https://www.ucd.ie/issda/data/nscpaos/> - The National Survey of Children, their Parents and Adults in Ireland offers a broad overview of children's internet access and digital literacy, supporting contextual understanding of children’s online activity and the potential for exposure to harmful content.
6. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/2024/04/21/teachers-raise-alarm-over-impact-of-online-harm-on-young-irish-children/> - This article reports on teachers in Ireland raising concerns about the emotional toll of online harm on young children, echoing INTO representatives' statements about the real and immediate impact of digital dangers on students.
7. <https://www.irishmirror.ie/news/irish-news/children-disturbing-online-content-ireland-35099605> - Please view link - unable to able to access data