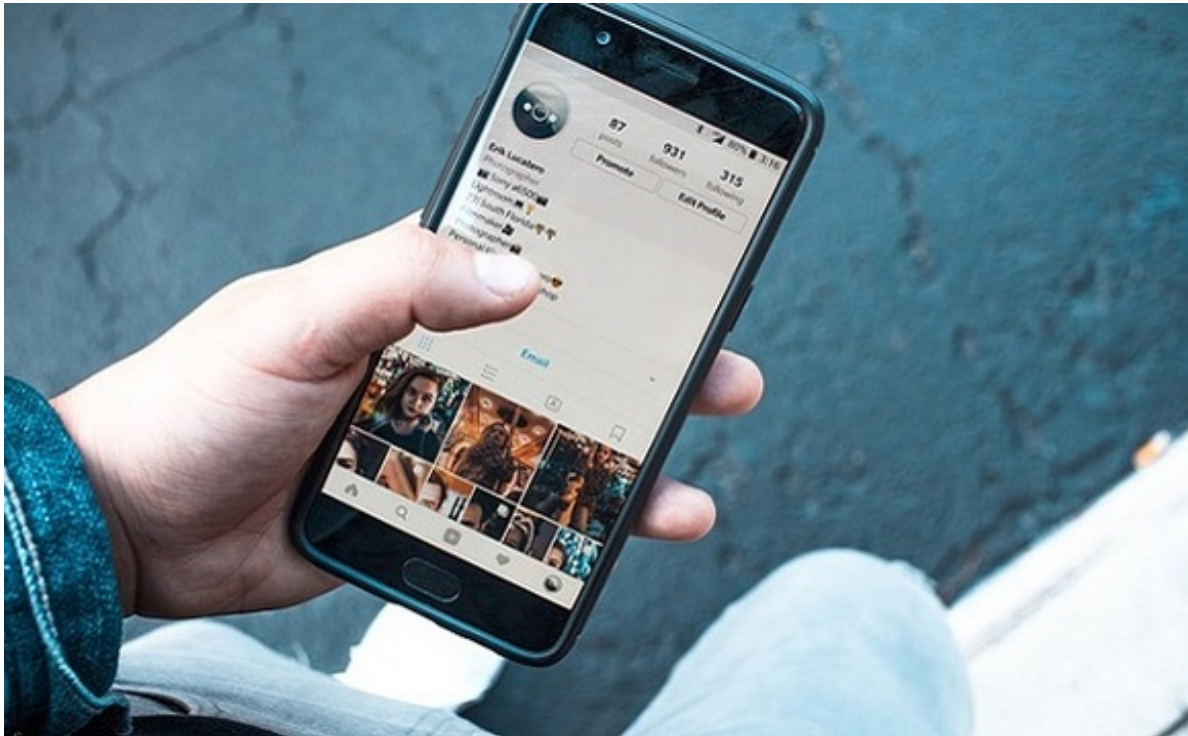


Facebook, Google and other tech firms pledge to follow new guidelines to fight online child abuse

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March 6,
2020



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Law enforcement agencies from the "Five Eyes" countries, in association with six technology firms, have unveiled a joint framework to fight online child exploitation and abuse.

The new framework, dubbed "[Voluntary Principles to Counter Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#)" [PDF], has been developed by the government agencies from the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and UK, in consultation with Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter, Roblox, and Snap.

It comprises 11 principles covering areas such as [preventing child abuse material from appearing](#), targeting online grooming and livestreaming, responding to evolving threats, a specialised approach for children and targeting child exploitation material searches.

The six tech firms voluntarily agreed to implement the new rules in efforts to prevent child abusers from targeting kids on their platforms.

Speaking at a press conference in Washington, US Attorney General William Barr said that many other technology companies are also showing interest in implementing the "Voluntary Principles" on their platforms.

"We hope the Voluntary Principles will spur collective action on the part of industry to stop one of the most horrendous crimes impacting some of the most vulnerable members of society," Barr added.

The joint framework doesn't directly address encryption, a contentious issue about which the tech industry has a different opinion from the law enforcement agencies.

In addition, the guidelines don't instruct tech firms about taking some specific step to follow the principles. They acknowledge that various online platforms /services are different from each other, so they will have different risk factors.

More than 69 million child sexual exploitation videos and images were reported by the tech industry last year, as per official figures by the UK government. A large number of such images were found being shared via online platforms, while the rest were exchanged via the dark web or encrypted communications.

Many tech firms have already introduced at least some measures to fight online child abuse. For example, YouTube and Facebook have put in place mechanisms to tag and trace videos and images violating their standards. Such images are also prevented from being uploaded again on those platforms.

Facebook's algorithms for flagging objectionable images and videos are now available on GitHub. Microsoft has also launched a tool to help people review chat-based conversations and detect online grooming.