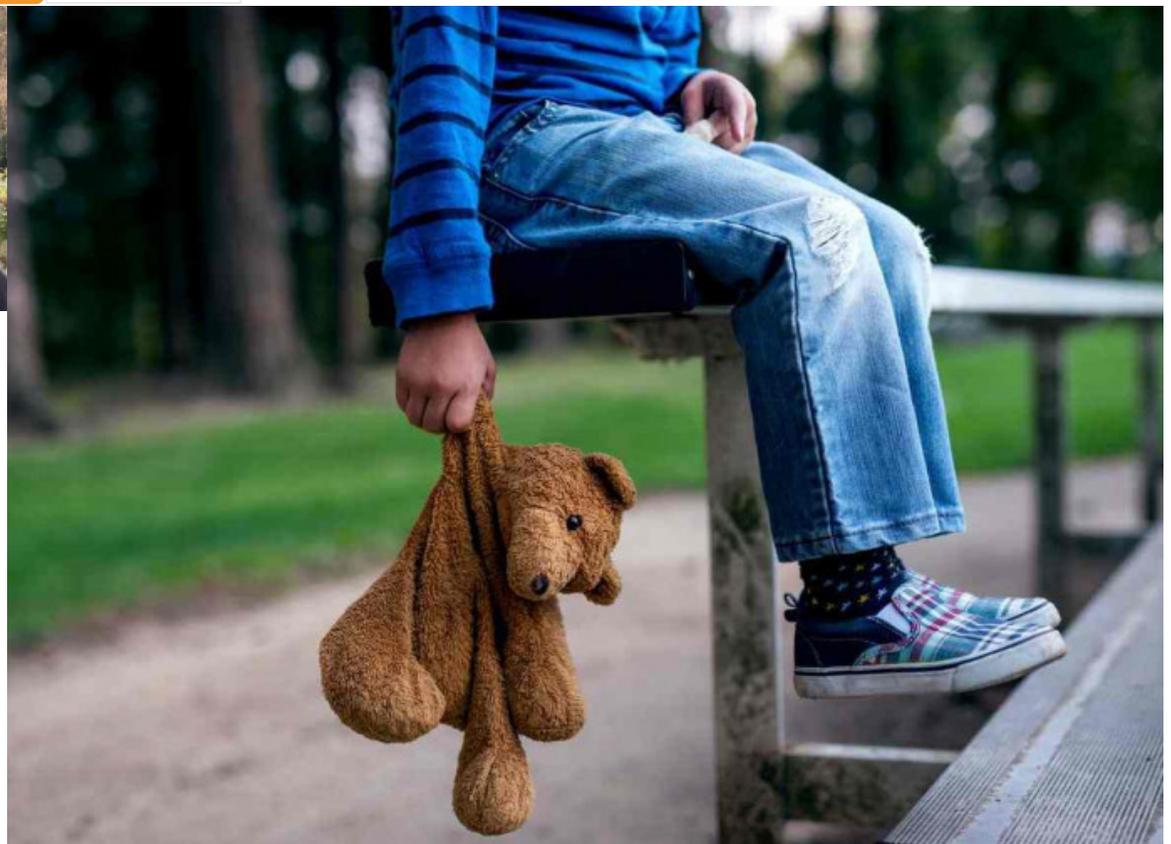Meter Report

AI, games and chat are the new strategies of paedophiles

LIFE AND BIOETHICS   25_02_2026

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Paedophiles are more cunning than the devil. Metaphor aside, this means that they are using increasingly sophisticated means to lure minors, share child pornography, and evade law enforcement. This is highlighted in Meter's latest annual report on paedophilia and child pornography

, which contains data from 2025 and was presented yesterday (24 February) in Rome. Meter is a child protection association founded in 1989 by Catholic priest Father Fortunato Di Noto.

The report is the result of the work of Meter's technical arm, the World Observatory against Paedophilia (Osmocop), which once again scoured the web in 2025 and identified a huge amount of illegal material. Specifically, 785,072 photos and 1,733,043 videos of child pornography were identified, depicting 'real abuse' of children and adolescents. The term 'real abuse' is important here, because in the age of artificial intelligence (AI), there has been an emergence — already reported for 2024 — of 'deepnudes', i.e. images manipulated using AI programmes to remove clothing from real photos.

In 2025, Meter identified 8,213 minors who were victims of deepnudes, which is a fact that should not be underestimated even though no direct physical violence is involved. "Behind every manipulated image, there is always a real victim: the minor portrayed in the original photo who suffers a violation of their identity. Their face is taken and sexualised without their consent," the report adds. Circulating the fake image online clearly causes deep trauma that can lead minors to commit extreme acts due to feelings of shame. Furthermore, the creation of fake child pornography fuels the market and stimulates demand for new illegal content. This negative impact is linked to another: the normalisation of paedophilia. This confirms that the virtual world has real-world consequences.

But what are the main channels for grooming minors and disseminating child pornography? On the one hand, there are less accessible areas of the internet, such as the dark web, and on the other, social networks and common messaging applications. With regard to the latter, Meter reported 655 groups characterised by grooming via fake profiles and the sharing of child pornography in 2025: more than two-thirds of these groups were found on Signal (451, or 69% of the total), which offers encrypted chat and call features.

While this feature protects users' privacy, it inevitably makes it very difficult to identify criminals. According to the report on Signal, "although the app itself has a strict policy against abuse of its platform, [...] it has become a 'safe haven' for child pornographers". According to Meter's monitoring, the second most popular messaging app among paedophiles is Telegram (145 groups, or 22%), followed by Instagram (23 groups, or 3.5%), Viber (14 groups, or 2%), WhatsApp (12 groups, or 2%), and other platforms (10 groups, or 1.5%).

Telegram is the most widely used channel for the spread of deepnude, followed by Signal. Grok, an AI programme developed by one of Elon Musk's companies, was responsible for creating 1,121 of these fake nude images, accounting for 14% of the total. The exploitation of social media as a bridge to illegal pages is also widespread; the most common phenomenon observed is the use of comment spaces on platforms such as TikTok and X to insert links to external content.

The report explains that there are several steps to accessing channels where child pornography can be viewed and that access is never direct. The entire system is designed to evade controls as much as possible and, in the event of censorship, to enable content and user groups to be transferred from one digital space to another. The final step: "In many cases, to obtain the final link from the group, the user must pay a 'tribute' or provide proof to ward off infiltrators or investigators. They are then obliged to upload unpublished material or perform specific actions to unlock access, thereby transforming themselves from mere spectators into active accomplices in the distribution of child pornography. On the subject of reports, Meter sent 1,106 protocols to the police in 2025. Overall, 25 police operations have been conducted following reports from the association since 2008.

This annual report focuses on an online gaming platform frequented by millions of minors for the first time: Roblox. The Meter Association surveyed 467 children aged 9–11 and found that 70% said they had encountered risks online, specifically on Roblox. These risks range from exposure to sexual content that is inappropriate for their age, such as a couple having sex in public, to stalking, threats and cyberbullying within the game, and even grooming. Regarding the latter, 45% of those surveyed reported grooming attempts, but only 10% were aware of and familiar with the phenomenon. In other words, children often mistake grooming attempts for attempts to steal their virtual identity. Meter points out that such risks 'are present on all online gaming platforms' and provides parents with a series of tips to help prevent them (p. 71 of the report).

One of the most disturbing perversions is the phenomenon of 'pedomama', which refers to abuse committed by women — sometimes mothers, as Meter presumes based on the contexts viewed — against a minor. Fr Di Noto's association has observed an increase in this phenomenon, discovering 320 photos and 11,240 videos on Signal, Telegram and Viber. Also on Signal, 24 groups containing photos and videos of children (average age: 11) being abused by dogs were found and reported. While the report does not mention it, in light of such squalour and sadism, which brings to mind certain content from the so-called Epstein files that has mostly been ignored by the media (see here), it is difficult to rule out the presence of initiatory and Satanist elements.

Another sad confirmation with an increasing trend is the abuse of minors by minors, most often males towards other males. The types of abuse here are also vast and range from disseminating videos and photos (including manipulated ones) without consent to sexual blackmail.

Meter renews its appeal to institutions and the media to contribute to the fight against paedophilia and child pornography. It also highlights the work of its listening centre, which helps minors with a wide range of problems to recover from their experiences every year.