TAXONOMY ANNEX: METHODOLOGY AND PLATFORM TYPES

'Online harms and men and boys' health: A practical taxonomy' was underpinned by a mixed-methods research approach combining an evidence and literature review, policy and regulatory mapping, and stakeholder consultation. The research sought to move beyond simply identifying harmful online content, to instead understand how harms affecting boys and young men manifest in digital environments, the specific mechanisms through which they may be facilitated or amplified, and their concrete consequences for health and wellbeing. This approach drew on ISD's expertise in researching – and establishing evidence-based taxonomies around – online harms, gender, digital ecosystems and platform dynamics. The research also examined how these harms are addressed within existing policy and regulatory frameworks, with a particular focus on Canada, the UK and Ireland.

Approach

Evidence and literature review

The development of the harms taxonomy began with a targeted review of English-language academic literature, policy research, government data and other relevant evidence concerning online harms affecting boys' and men's health and wellbeing. The review focused particularly on the UK, Canada and Ireland, while drawing on international evidence where relevant. It identified harmful online experiences, behaviours and practices, alongside their documented or potential consequences for health and wellbeing.

Three overarching criteria guided the selection of harms: (1) evidence of an established or plausible impact on boys' and men's health and wellbeing; (2) a relevant gendered dimension, including how gender shapes exposure, vulnerability or impact; and (3) a clear relationship with digital environments, including how online platforms, features or communities may facilitate or amplify the harm. While all included harms affected boys and men, they were not required to affect them exclusively or disproportionately.

These findings provided the basis for identifying 22 distinct sub-harms, grouped according to the principal dimensions of health and wellbeing they affected. This process led to four overarching harm areas: sexual health harms, physical and mental health harms, relational and psychosocial harms, and financial harms. The categorisation was refined to distinguish between different forms of harm while recognising that they may overlap, interact or reinforce one another. The four overarching harm areas and their associated sub-harms were also reviewed during stakeholder consultations, with participants agreeing with the proposed categorisation and the four overarching groupings which were used in the final taxonomy.

The review also identified research gaps, including harms whose health consequences are well documented but whose relationship with digital environments remains less established, alongside emerging harms with limited empirical evidence. As a targeted rather than systematic review, the evidence base is not exhaustive. Its geographical focus and restriction to English-language sources mean the taxonomy should not be interpreted as a comprehensive global assessment of online harms.

Taxonomy development

Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD UK) is a company limited by guarantee in England (registered charity number 1141069 and company registration number 06581421) with its registered address at 3rd Floor, 45 Albemarle Street, Mayfair, London, W1S 4JL.

To systematically examine the 22 identified sub-harms, the taxonomy brings together 3 interconnected analytical dimensions: the nature of each harm, the digital pathways and mechanisms through which it manifests, and its consequences for boys' and men's health and wellbeing. Reflecting the taxonomy's public health approach, this structure enables a holistic assessment of how harmful experiences, digital environments and health outcomes interact, while providing a consistent framework for examining different harms.

Each harm was therefore mapped across three dimensions:

- **Nature of the harm:** What the harm involves, including its definition, examples of how it manifests online, and its gendered dimensions.
- **Digital pathways and mechanisms:** How online environments may facilitate, amplify, normalise or sustain the harm, including relevant platform types, online ecosystems, features and affordances.
- **Adverse consequences and impacts:** The documented or potential effects on boys' and men's physical, mental, sexual, financial and relational wellbeing, including how particular vulnerabilities may shape these outcomes.

This systematic mapping enabled the taxonomy to distinguish between harmful experiences and behaviours themselves and the specific role of digital environments in shaping their manifestation and consequences. It also supported the identification of relationships between harms, including shared platform mechanisms and instances where harms may overlap or reinforce one another. Wider interpersonal, community and societal consequences are examined in the accompanying impact framework.

Policy and regulatory mapping

The research mapped over two hundred regulatory and policy frameworks relevant to the identified harms, examining whether, where and how existing regulatory and policy approaches address online harms affecting boys and young men, and identifying potential gaps in coverage.

The analysis focused primarily on the UK (75 frameworks), Canada (56 frameworks), and Ireland and wider European Union initiatives relevant to the Irish context (70 frameworks), while also drawing comparative digital policy insights from Australia and New Zealand.

The mapping considered both regulations specifically designed to address online harms and wider policy frameworks relevant to their prevention and mitigation, including consumer and financial protection, gambling, data protection, and sexual or image-based abuse. This broader approach reflected the fact that the harms identified in the taxonomy do not necessarily correspond to existing regulatory categories and may fall across multiple areas of policy responsibility.

The mapped frameworks are clustered by the three focus jurisdictions and separated according to the following categories:

1. Criminal law
2. Online safety, platform and data frameworks
3. Drugs, medicines and health products frameworks
4. Gambling frameworks
5. Finance frameworks
6. Health and education frameworks
7. Violence, abuse and social cohesion frameworks

Each entry was then assessed against the 22 harms outlined in the taxonomy. For each harm and jurisdiction, policy 'coverage' was assessed at five stages of the harm pathway, clustered according to 'primary' (1-2), 'secondary' (3-4) and 'tertiary' (5) stages of prevention:

1. Societal prevention (incl. education, strategies and campaigns)
2. Design prevention (incl. safety-by-design, risk assessments and age assurance)
3. Exposure mitigation (incl. access-restriction, user tools and advertising rules)
4. Intervention and removal (incl. takedown, enforcement and criminal investigation)
5. Redress and recovery (incl. complaints, prosecution and support services).

We then analysed the extent of coverage for each of these dimensions of harm mitigation above, which were summarised by the following ratings given to each harm area:

- Binding law that directly covers a harm at a given stage (Y – Yes)
- Partial coverage (PT – partial)
- Non-binding policy (PO – policy only)
- Pending measure (PE – pending)
- No identified framework (N – No)

Stakeholder consultation and validation

Expert stakeholder consultations formed an important part of the taxonomy's development and refinement. ISD and Movember conducted consultations with policymakers in the UK and Canada which brought together senior government officials, policymakers and specialist practitioners from across a broad range of departments, including public health and men's health, online safety and digital regulation, privacy and children's rights, gender equality, violence prevention, national security, criminal justice and victims' rights.

Participants represented relevant government departments, regulatory bodies, public institutions and civil society organisations, providing valuable cross-sectoral perspectives on the nature, prevalence and impacts of online harms affecting boys and men, as well as potential policy and regulatory responses within their focus jurisdictions. A dedicated Irish practitioner consultation brought together frontline experts and specialist organisations working directly on the harms identified in the taxonomy, providing practical insights into how these harms manifest, their consequences for boys and men, and emerging challenges in prevention and response.

Finally, an additional consultation was held through ISD's Digital Policy Lab, providing an opportunity for a wider group of regulators and digital policy makers from Ireland, the UK, New Zealand, Australia and the wider EU (including the Netherlands, France, and Germany) to contribute their perspectives on existing regulatory approaches, emerging challenges and potential policy gaps.

These consultations provided valuable insights that informed the refinement of the taxonomy, helped contextualise and validate emerging findings, and highlighted gaps in the available evidence. They also contributed to a better understanding of how the identified harms intersect with existing areas of policy and practice, including challenges relating to regulatory coverage and implementation. Stakeholder contributions were further instrumental in informing the development of recommendations, helping ensure that the final taxonomy is grounded in both research evidence and the practical experiences of those working to prevent and address online harms.

Definitions: Platform types

The following guide provides definitions of the platform types referenced throughout the harms taxonomy. It establishes a consistent terminology for categorising the digital environments in which harms may emerge or be amplified, while recognising that individual platforms may span multiple categories and serve different functions.

Regulators define platforms by function, and these definitions overlap on a jurisdictional level. For example, whether a service stores and disseminates user content to the public (EU), whether user content "may be encountered by another user" (UK), whether the "sole or primary purpose" is online social interaction (Australia), or whether its "primary purpose" is to facilitate online communication among users (Canada).

Given this, to ensure relevance across jurisdictions, the taxonomy defines the platform types based on a description of the service and its primary function, followed by examples. Some overlap between services and platform types is also natural.

Social media platforms

Description: A service whose primary function is to enable users to create a profile or account, form connections with other users, and post, share and react to content that is disseminated to an open or semi-public audience, typically ordered by a recommender system.
Examples: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Threads, LinkedIn.

Video-sharing platforms

Description: A service whose principal purpose or essential function is to make user-uploaded (short-form, long-form or live) video content available to other users. This is often organised by the provider through recommendations, tagging and sequencing.
Examples: YouTube, TikTok, Twitch, Vimeo, short-video features within social media (Facebook or Instagram Reels).

Messaging platforms

Description: A service whose primary function is direct, interpersonal communication between a defined set of users determined by the sender, including one-to-one and group messaging, voice and video calls. Some may feature broadcasting (i.e. channels, communities, public groups) that disseminate content to a semi-public audience. Some may feature encryption options.
Examples: WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal, iMessenger, Facebook Messenger, SnapChat.

Pornography platforms

Description: A service whose primary purpose is to make sexually explicit content available, whether produced or licensed by the provider, uploaded by users, or performed live.
Examples: Pornhub, XVideos, XNXX, Stripchat, OnlyFans.

Online gaming platforms

Description: Online games and gaming platforms that enable users to play with or against other users, together with the services which can – in some cases – be built around the game, such as distribution stores, voice and text chat, livestreaming of gameplay, user-generated game worlds, and -game economies (e.g. virtual currencies, loot boxes, skins).
Examples: Roblox, Fortnite, Minecraft.

Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD UK) is a company limited by guarantee in England (registered charity number 1141069 and company registration number 06581421) with its registered address at 3rd Floor, 45 Albemarle Street, Mayfair, London, W1S 4JL.

Gaming adjacent platforms

Description: A set of diverse social platforms that are used primarily by (or were primarily designed for) online gaming audiences, including gaming-oriented messaging and video streaming services.
Examples: Discord, Twitch.

Generative AI chatbots

Description: Deep-learning models that take raw data and generate statistically probable outputs when prompted. Generative models encode a simplified representation of their training data and draw from it to create a new work that's similar, but not identical, to the original data.
Examples: ChatGPT, Gemini, Grok, Meta AI.

Relevant jurisdictional definition:

- Canada's Bill C-34 defines chatbot services as "an artificial intelligence system that":
  - (a) communicates over the Internet;
  - (b) is made available on a website or through an application that is publicly accessible in Canada;
  - (c) uses a natural language interface to provide, in a conversational format, adaptive, human-like responses to user inputs;
  - (d) is capable of being used, by means of multiple interactions or sessions, to simulate a sustained human-like relationship with a user, including one that may resemble friendship, an intimate relationship or therapeutic support; and
  - (e) generates content or responses that are not fully predetermined by the developer of the system or the person that operates the system.

Companion AI

Description: Generative AI services that interact with users through a natural-language interface and are designed or marketed in a way to simulate a sustained relationship (such as friend, partner, mentor, or character). They usually feature personas, memory across sessions and dialogue in response to emotions.
Examples: Character.AI, Replika, Nomi, Talkie.

Nudification Apps

Description: A tool, website or bot that uses AI to digitally remove clothing from photographs of real people to generate synthetic nude images.

Forums and anonymous platforms

Description: Services organised around topic-based communities or threaded discussion, in which users often participate under pseudonyms or with no persistent identity, and where moderation is substantially delegated to community volunteers or is – on more fringe services – completely absent.
Examples: Reddit, Quora, 4Chan, 8kun, Kiwi Farms, incel forums, Stack Exchange.

Dating platforms

Description: Services whose primary purpose is to enable users to find and initiate romantic or sexual relationships with other users, often through profile creation, matching and private messaging. Often combined with location and subscription features.
Examples: Tinder, Hinge, Bumble, Grindr, OKCupid, eHarmony.

Creator economy platforms

Description: Services whose defining function is to let individual creators monetise an audience directly through subscriptions, tips, paid communities, courses, merchandise or pay-per view content, often rather than through platform-controlled advertising. This category is anchored in the monetisation and audience relationship.
Examples: OnlyFans, Fansly, Patreon, Substack, creator subscriptions within social platforms (YouTube memberships, X subscriptions, TikTok Series).

Financial/trading platforms (including crypto)

Description: Services that enable retail users to trade, invest in or speculate on financial instruments, cryptoassets, contracts for difference, prediction markets or similar products, combined with a social and/or promotional layer around them, such as copy-trading features, community chat, "finfluencer" content and affiliate marketing.
Examples: Robinhood, eToro, Trading212, Coinbase, Binance, Kraken, Kalshi, the promotional layer on social media and messaging apps such as YouTube, TikTok, X, Telegram and Discord.

Gambling and betting platforms

Description: Services offering real-money gambling by remote communication (sports and race wagering, casino and slots, poker, lotteries and betting on esports) together with gambling like services that sit outside licensing regimes (skin betting and case-opening sites, social casino games, crypto casinos).
Examples: bet365, Entain (Ladbrokes, Sportsbet), Flutter (Paddy Power, Sportsbet AU, FanDuel), DraftKings, Stake.com (crypto casino), CSGORoll.

ECommerce platforms

Description: Online marketplaces and retail platforms that allow consumers to buy goods or services from third-party traders or the platform itself, including general marketplaces, peer-to-peer resale, supplement and pharmacy retail, and social-commerce features embedded in other platforms.
Examples: Amazon, eBay, Temu, Shein, AliExpress, Etsy, Vinted, Gumtree, TikTok Shop, Instagram Shopping; supplement and peptide retailers.