

# Government funds new tech to tackle online child abuse

Five tech companies from the UK and beyond will receive government funding to build projects to combat child exploitation and abuse online.

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The five winners of the Safety Tech Challenge Fund will receive £85,000 each from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Home Office to innovate new digital tools to make the internet safer for children and young people.

The tech companies will specifically target the spread of child sexual abuse material on end-to-end encrypted messaging platforms, which make it harder for law enforcement to track criminal activity.

The projects include a new AI plug-in that can be used in the background of encrypted messaging platforms to identify images of child abuse and flag them to moderators. Other technologies will use age estimation and facial recognition technology to scan for child abuse images before they are uploaded, while another project is set to tackle the issue of how to prevent live-streaming of violence and child pornography.

The five tech companies coming from cities across the UK, including Edinburgh, London, Poole and St Albans, will spend the next five months developing their projects. Another block of funding, worth £130,000, will be made available to the strongest projects, bringing the total funding to £555,000.

Digital Minister Chris Philp, who met with the winners on Tuesday, said: “It’s entirely possible for social media platforms to use end-to-end encryption without hampering efforts to stamp out child abuse. But they’ve failed to take action to address this problem so we are stepping in to help develop the solutions needed.”

“We’re pro-tech and pro-privacy but we won’t compromise on children’s safety. Through our pioneering Online Safety Bill, and in partnership with cutting-edge safety tech firms, we will make the online world a safer place for children.”

The announcement came as G7 countries and other invitees met virtually for the G7 Safety Tech Summit yesterday to discuss how global leaders could collaborate on innovation in safety tech and help to deliver safer online environments globally.

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