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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, it is no longer just the family album or the school chronicle that are the places where memories are collected. It is estimated that around 500 million photos a day are published on the Internet, above all on social networks. Video games are also increasingly popular online.

In all this, there is no shortage of content involving children. Their images are shared by adults before they make their own mark on the Internet. Cute photos from holidays, nursery or school celebrations, videos of their first steps, memories of important moments, but also snapshots of ordinary everyday situations. It sounds innocent, all the more so as they are often made available with good intentions. Unfortunately, the consequences of such publications can be very drastic. Among their recipients are haters, creators of ridiculous memes, swindlers and even people with paedophilic tendencies. It is worthwhile for adults to be aware both of their legal obligations resulting from the regulations on processing and disseminating images of children, and of the possible consequences and risks associated with publishing this type of content on the Internet. Therefore, it is worth taking into account not only the legal aspect, but also the ethical one when considering this issue.

We see a growing problem of negligence and lack of awareness, both from a legal point of view and in relation to the subjective treatment of children whose images are immortalised in materials made available via the Internet. This publication has been produced to support adults in respecting children's right to privacy. Particularly those working in various institutions, organisations and institutions whose task it is to care for the welfare and safety of children, all the more so as the new



It is the responsibility of schools, kindergartens, sports clubs, community centres, etc. to implement standards for the protection of minors. They provide an opportunity to regulate many issues related to the prevention of child abuse and neglect, also in the digital environment.

We are the first generation that is facing completely new social challenges caused by the dynamic development of technology. This material is an invitation to reflect and make considered decisions about one of these challenges - the publication of children's images on the Internet.

Together, we can look for more ethical and more empathetic ways to respect the rights and subjectivity of the child in the smartphone era. It is important that the 'trendy' desire to share everything online does not overshadow our concern for the safety, well-being and future of children. We also have the chance to create a digital *savoir-vivre of* caring for each other, while supporting the younger generation not to lose their human, empathetic reflexes on the way to online reach and popularity.



The image is subject to legal protection. It is both a personal good and a personal data. It is worthwhile for adults to use images of children in particular carefully and responsibly.

The image of a natural person has not been defined in Polish law.

In order to determine what this term means, it is necessary to rely on the de-finitions presented by the doctrine and court rulings. Contrary to popular belief, a person's image is more than his or her

head or face. It is the image of a person (i.e. the various physical features that make up his or her appearance, including both the face and, for example, a characteristic silhouette) that has been fixed in some way (in a photograph, film, etc.). The image allows a person to be recognised and individualised. According to some views presented by Polish courts, additional elements, such as clothing, glasses or hairstyle may also be included in the framework of the image.

(A)

Dissemination of the image means various forms of making it available to the public, so that it reaches an unlimited circle of recipients who may become acquainted with it. This includes, for example, publishing the image in social media, on websites and on the Internet.

It does not matter whether such dissemination involves financial gain or serves other purposes, such as promoting the activities of the NGO, sports club, school or kindergarten. It is irrelevant whether such dissemination involves financial gain or serves other purposes, such as promoting the activities of the NGO, sports club, school or kindergarten in question.



The image is a personal good and is therefore subject to protection or the provisions of the Civil Code¹. It is a non-material, non-transferable ght to which every person is entitled. Dissemination of the image without permission may result in civil claims for infringement of personal rights. According to the law, the person whose personal rights have been infringed may demand that the infringement cease (e.g. removal of the picture from the Internet), that its effects be removed (e.g. submission of a statement containing an apology), as well as redress of grievances.

make and repair the damage thus caused.



As a rule, the dissemination of a person's image (and thus the publication on the Internet) requires their consent - issues concerning this area are also regulated in the Act on Copyright and Related Rights².



The image is also one of the personal data and is protected under the provisions contained in the RODO³ and the Personal Data Protection Act⁴. The processing of personal data in the form of an image

is its dissemination (e.g. publishing on social media), but also, inter alia, its recording (e.g. taking a photo), storage (e.g. on a computer disk) or modification (e.g. facial smoothing with an application). As is clear from the RODO, the processor has information and security obligations in relation to the processed data. Recital 38 of the RODO emphasises that **special protection of personal data is required for children**, as they may be less aware of the risks, consequences, safeguards and their rights in relation to the processing of personal data. Recital 58 provides a guideline that, when processing a child's data, clear and simple messages should be used which allow their content to be easily understood by the child as well.

Articles 23 and 24 of the Act of 23 April 1964 - Civil Code (Journal of Laws 2023, item 1610, as amended).

Article 81 of the Act of 4 February 1994 on Copyright and Related Rights (Journal of Laws 2022, item 2509).

Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation) of 27 April 2016 (OJ EU L 119/1 of 4 May 2016, p. 1).

⁴ Act of 10 May 2018 on the protection of personal data (Journal of Laws 2019, item 1781).





In the case of a child, the provisions of the Family and Guardianship Code also play an important protective role⁵. Parents have parental authority, which should be exercised according to certain rules. On behalf of children, consent to the dissemination of vis-

The parents or legal guardians of the offspring are responsible for the image.

However, they do not have an unlimited right to dispose of the image of their offspring. It is their duty to raise the child with respect for his or her dignity and rights, looking after his or her best interests. The Family and Guardianship Code (as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child⁶) indicates that parents should listen to their children (taking into account, among other things, the child's degree of maturity) and take their reasonable wishes into account as far as possible before making important decisions concerning their wards. In practice, this may mean that the child must be consulted about the publication of his or her image or consent to its dissemination.



Parents are obliged to exercise parental responsibility in such a way as to the best interests of the child. Irresponsible online publication of photographs or films in a way that affects the dignity of the person depicted or in situations

intimate images may violate this principle and infringe the child's welfare, which may expose the parent to civil law liability towards the child in the future, once the child has reached the age of majority. In extreme cases involving the dissemination of a child's nude image, criminal law provisions may also apply⁷.



In the context of the right to the protection of the image, one cannot fail to mention the fundamental right of every human being to privacy, deriving, inter alia, from Article 47 of the Polish Constitution⁸, as well as from the catalogue of human rights and the rights of the child.

Articles 92 and 95 of the Act of 25 February 1964 - Family and Guardianship Code (Journal of Laws 2023, item 2809).

Article 12(1) Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by t h e United Nations General Assembly of 20 November 1989 (Journal of Laws of 1991, No. 120, item 526).

Article 191a of the Act of 6 June 1997. - Penal Code (Journal of Laws 2024, item 17).

⁸ Article 47 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997 (Journal of Laws of 1997, No. 78 item 483).











How should consent to disseminate a child's image be structured?

Consent for the dissemination of the child's image should:

- be given **voluntarily**, the parent/legal guardian may not be coerced into giving it;
- be as precise and transparent as possible;
- indicate the purpose of the use of the image, e.g. to promote the activities of the the organisation's or establishment's walls, a public awareness campaign;
 - indicate the specific ways in which the image will be used, such as
 publication on a social media profile (with clarification on which
 services), publication on the organisation's website;
 - specify the conditions for the use of the image, e.g. the image will be signed with the child's name or accompanied by a comment, the photo will be cropped, the photo will be edited;
 - be written in language that both the parent and the elderly can understand. a child:
 - be expressed in favour of a specific entity;
 - concern a designated period of time;
 - be **prior in nature**, i.e. expressed prior to the publication of the photo. cia/recordings.

This type of document can be in **any form**, but it is important to remember that, for evidentiary purposes, it should preferably be **recorded** in some way - in writing, electronically, e.g. by e-mail, SMS. It is also not possible to request the withdrawal of consent and you should be prepared for the consequences of making such a withdrawal, e.g. the removal of a photo from your social media profile.



Is consent to disseminate an image always needed?

The dissemination of an image of a person who constitutes only a detail of such a whole, such as a **gathering**, **landscape or public event**, does not require consent. If the image is only an element of a photograph, constitutes a small part thereof, the removal of which would not change the subject and nature of what is shown, there is no need to obtain consent to publish it pursuant to the applicable regulations. Thus, if a photograph of a specific event (e.g. a sports event, a school picnic or a workshop) is intended to present the event in question and its participants are not the dominant element of the shot, the photograph will be taken without close-ups on a particular stand or a small group of people, the above exemption may be relied upon.

At the same time, it should always be remembered that, despite the fact that it is not necessary to obtain consent to disseminate the image, if the person in the image can be identified, the image will constitute personal data and it will be necessary to apply the regulations on personal data processing in this respect.

Standards for the protection of minors as an opportunity to regulate the publication of images of children

The work on standards for the protection of minors, which all entities working with children (including schools, kindergartens, crèches, sports clubs, hotels, hospitals and libraries) are obliged to implement, seems to be an excellent opportunity to rethink and regulate not only the issues related to children's access to the Internet, protection from harm, dangerous content or online contact, but also the publication of their images - whether and under what conditions it is disseminated by a given institution.

In a world driven by digital developments that are sometimes difficult to keep up with, there are new challenges and decisions to be made that no previous generation has had to face. Many things simply have to be learned and new solutions developed. However, it is always worthwhile to be guided by the interests of the child, concern for his or her rights and future, and, in a world full of ecracies, it is all the more important to develop an empathetic approach and respect for privacy.



BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM AND SCALE OF THE PHENOMENON

Leaving aside the formal and legal issues and what protection a child's image enjoys, it is worth noting how and to what extent content involving children is presented on the Internet, how young people feel about it and what risks adults should take into account before publishing the material.

For it turns out that:

- 23%
- 23% of children already have a digital footprint before birth in the form of ultrasound images of their pregnancy, which circulate on the Internet⁹. This phenomenon is not researched very often, but from the available data we know that in Europe this percentage is lower, at around 15%, and in Poland 10% of parents decide to make such a publication¹⁰.
- 81%
- 81% of children under the age of two have a digital footprint in the form of photos published online by their parents, and 5% have a social networking profile¹¹.
- 75%

The majority - up to 75% - of UK parents who regularly use the internet share photos or videos of their children¹².





In Poland, 40% of parents document their children's growing up on social media. On average, they publish 72 photos and 24 films online annually. It is worth noting that when reporting on their child's life, they do not apply restrictions on the display of published materials. As many as 42% share them with larger groups of friends of up to 200 people. According to the declaration, 25% of parents ask their child(ren) for permission before uploading a photo or video, if possible (e.g. due to the child's age)¹³.

SHARENTING

the term, which is derived from a combination of the English words share and parenting, refers to the online publication by parents - often and unreflectively - of content with their children in a leading role. Sometimes without checking and respecting their opinion on the matter. It can be pictures, films, but also information about their activities and even snippets of conversations. This phenomenon, common among modern parents, also functions under the name of

oversharenting, which is intended to emphasise its redundancy.



It is difficult to ask young children for their opinions about adults publishing their images online. **But what do teenagers say?**

According to the report *Teenagers* 3.0, 45.5 % of teenagers in Poland report that their parents or guardians make their image public, with 23.8 % feeling embarrassed about this and 18.8 % being unconcerned¹⁴.

Negative or offensive comments caused by content posted online by their parents were declared by 7% of teenage participants in the *EU Kids Online 2018 survey*¹⁵.

In contrast, according to the EU Kids Online 2018 study, almost one in ten 11-17 year olds (9.5% of the total surveyed) are aware that their parents occasionally post some content about them online without asking permission. Of these, one in two (51.3%) have felt upset and about two in five (41.6%) have been the recipients unpleasant of result comments something posted on the Internet by their guardians¹⁶.

In 2023, the "Curiosity" Centre the Orange Foundation conducted a qualitative study, which also shows that young people surveyed are afraid of being played with photographed in a situation they do not want to show to others, and that materials featuring them, result also as unwanted modifications, will be the cause of ridicule, heckling and peer bullying¹⁷.



THE RISK OF MAKING IMAGES OF CHILDREN AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET

1)

Nothing is lost on the internet

Once posted, the material can stay there forever. Shared by thousands of users, it can spread rapidly, making it difficult, if not impossible, to remove.

Photographs or videos published on the web are no longer the property of the publishers alone.

Once published on the web, a lot can happen to a piece of content - and beyond the control and influence of the person publishing it. A photo or video can be downloaded, modified, used and distributed by others (including fraudsters) for purposes far removed from the intentions of the person publishing it. And even if the content in question cannot be downloaded, practically every device allows for taking a so-called screenshot and copying the material.

3

Cyberbullying

Published photos or videos of children can expose them to heckling, mockery and hurtful comments - online and in real life. All of this can affect their self-esteem and mood, causing anger, sadness and feelings of helplessness. Materials that end up in the hands of a child's peers or friends can be used against the child - also in an act of cyberbullying - to bully, ridicule, taunt or blackmail. Particularly in their teens, children use such content - sometimes as a joke, at other times in an emotional way, to take revenge or to tease someone, and often because they have not yet developed empathic behaviour or are unable to predict the impact of their own actions on others.





Use of child content for criminal purposes, including sexual exploitation

Much of the material readily available on the Internet falls into the wrong hands of fraudsters and even paedophiles. There are cases of digital identity theft, e.g. to run collections for a 'sick' child depicted with a photo of a random child, or to use the stolen image to realise various fantasies, including violent or sexual ones. In September 2023, it made headlines when photos of 28 Spanish teenage girls downloaded from social media were used by perpetrators to create nude deepfakes (so-called 'deepnude') using an AI-based app. Photographs of teenage girls' faces with images of naked bodies attached to them were uploaded to the internet without their knowledge or consent. The investigation is also looking into an attempt to blackmail and extort money from one of the girls whose photo was used.

It also happens that pictures or recordings end up on pornographic content forums with children. In order to be admitted to a closed forum with access to this type of material, the perpetrator must make something new available. In this way, many photos and videos involving children posted on social media feed closed online forums for people with paedophilic tendencies. Unfortunately, in extreme cases, the publication of this type of material can lead to a situation in which persons dangerous to the child seek to make contact with the child and exploit him or her in some way, including sexually.

Academic and journalistic sources indicate that a large number of the images of children found on paedophile pornographic sites come from adults close to them who, unaware of the consequences of their actions, make their images available on social media¹⁹. In 2015, Australia's e-safety commissioner for children sounded the alarm that images of minors originally published on social media and family blogs accounted for as much as half of the material found on some sites providing child pornographic content²⁰.





Unknowingly sharing a wide range of information

Very often (even unintentionally) much more information than the image itself is made available with a photo or video. These images are usually accompanied by a commentary and are placed in a specific context, such as a specific event or moment. Nowadays, people are more and more cautious about sharing information about themselves, without thinking about how much data about the child is shared online together with their photo, or agreeing to such a publication by, for example, a school. An image recorded in a specific context (e.g. a geography lesson and a presentation by a pupil about his or her holiday destination), combined with information about the school and class the child attends and the child's name, makes it possible for an outsider to use the data collected in this way in any way he or she wishes, including for security purposes.

"If we were to go on Instagram right now and randomly select a photo with a child we don't know at all, we would probably easily find out what his or her name and parents are, where he or she lives (location often given next to posts), when he or she was born (cute video testimonials of blowing out candles, uploaded exactly on the day of the birth), we may even deduce its name, find out what it likes, what its talents are, where it spends its holidays and where it goes to kindergarten" - writes Magdalena Bigaj, President of the Institute of Digital Citizenship, in her book *Wychowanie przy ekranie*. All this helps to build the basis for dangerous contacts, for gaining the child's trust from people who may want to take advantage of them.







Use of images of children for commercial and profit-making purposes

Sometimes children's images are used for commercial purposes without their consent or awareness. Many influencers use photos and films of children, both their own and others', to promote various services and products. Such activities are increasingly being assessed by various experts and considered as unlawful use of the image of minors for commercial purposes. There is even discussion in France and Norway about banning the publication of images of children by their parents for commercial purposes²². It is also sometimes the case that meetings, workshops or events organised for the youngest in schools or other institutions are photographed or filmed by the companies involved, and the materials obtained in this way with the participation of participants in such events are used to promote these entities, the products or services they offer or the image of a public figure. The child unknowingly (and without compensation) participates in such promotion.



Violation of dignity

The Internet is full of footage of children in embarrassing situations, underdressed or naked. Shots from the beach, pool, during hygienic activities (or even on the toilet) are shared online, compromising and humiliating the persons depicted, ridiculing their reactions and emotions. An example of this is the 'egg chal- lenge', a challenge popular at one time on Instagram, where adults smashed eggs on young children's foreheads for 'fun', filming their reactions. These were recordings of children in tears, helplessness and difficult emotions, which were also accompanied by hilarious comments from adults.



TROLL PARENTING

the phenomenon of parents unreflectively publishing content on the internet that disparages, ridicules and humiliates the child (even if unintentionally and for a 'joke'). These are the videos, popular on the web, which capture, for example, the reactions of babies being doused with water, children being awakened from anaesthesia or crying because of a burst balloon. These are pictures of children eating from dog bowls or stained after a visit to the toilet - accompanied by hilarious comments. Often, the situations depicted involve fear, surprise, crying or other difficult emotions of children who have been exposed to ridicule by adults on the Internet.

Such action detracts from the child's dignity, prejudices him or her for the sake of a "joke" and, in a social sense, lowers his or her status as a person who can be made fun of without consequences.

Taking away a child's right to build their own story about themselves

Every person should have the ability to create their own identity and wize-run, including in the digital environment, to decide what they want to publish about themselves and what should remain in the realm of privacy. In the case of children whose lives have been excessively and without consultation with them documented online by adults, this process can be disrupted. Their digital footprint is building before they can decide for themselves what information about themselves they want to make public. All of this can affect the safety, wellbeing and future of young people, including their professional future (it happens that recruiters and recruiters review the stories of job candidates online, including on social media).





Lack of subjective treatment of children

Apart from being aware of the unpleasant consequences, it is worth considering something else: the subjective treatment of children. Young people are still not sufficiently involved in deciding about issues that affect them, while managing their own image is an element of their right to privacy, the right to tell stories about themselves on the Internet in the way they would like to. It is worth asking them for permission to publish their images, talking to them about the benefits and risks of such decisions, asking about their feelings today and their perspectives for the future.

However, it is also worth asking the (important) question in this context:



IS IT POSSIBLE TO GIVE FULLY INFORMED CONSENT TO THE PUBLICATION OF A CHILD'S IMAGE?

Is a 6-10 year old (and older child) able to understand the laws governing online publications and the consequences of such exposure?

Due to the age of the child's developmental stage, there is a considerable risk that they will not. In addition, when asking for permission to publish an image, it is worth taking into account that the child is often in a situation of emotional dependence on a (trusted) adult and is probably able to agree to more than in a relationship with a complete stranger.

The responsibility for protecting the child's privacy therefore lies mainly with the adults.





TO PUBLISH YOUR CHILD'S IMAGE ON THE INTERNET OR NOT? WHAT IS WORTH CONSIDERING?

What should establishments serving children and young people consider before publishing images of their charges?

We should not frighten children, especially the youngest ones, with information about online scammers, digital identity theft and other unpleasant possible consequences of publishing content involving them. Instead, it is important to support them in the belief that they have the right to privacy and to decide about their own image. It is also definitely worth ensuring that every adult is aware of the potential consequences of disseminating images of children. And although the subject of sharenting largely concerns parents, institutions working on behalf of children should show particular responsibility. It is to them that the youngest and their guardians trust, and it is with their decisions that they can play a key role in building public awareness of the child's right to privacy. This is all the more so because a lot of content involving children is published online in an excessive, unreflective, sometimes unnecessary manner, and even without respect for the subjectivity or dignity of children.

Child welfare agencies should be particularly responsible when it comes to protecting children's images. It is they who, through their decisions, can play a key role in creating public awareness of a child's right to privacy.



What should you think about before deciding to publish your child's image?

- For what purpose do you want to publish the image of the child? Is it necessary to show the child in order to achieve it?
- Is there any other way to meet the objective and not publish the vise- rial?
- What happens if you do not include an image of your child?
- Who is watching your profile or other channel on which you want to opu- ply your child's material?
- Do you have a consent for the use of the child's image voluntarily signed by the child's parent or legal guardian and clearly stating the purpose and specific manner of dissemination?
- Are the children not forced in any way to be in the photo or video?
 Do they feel comfortable, safe and secure with being photographed or filmed in the moment?
- Is a child whose parent or legal guardian has not consented to the publication of his or her image excluded from photographed activities for this reason?
- Does the photograph or video not show the child in an embarrassing or inappropriate situation? Is he or she wearing full clothing (not in underwear, a bathing suit or naked)?
- How might a child feel about seeing this material in the future?
- How might a **prospective employer** react to such a publication child, what might he think of him?
- Does this publication in any way violate the child's dignity, embarrass him or her, or expose him or her to ridicule?
- Will the publication of the image not violate the child's privacy? Will
 it not reveal information about him/her that should be kept
 confidential?
- Won't it expose him to trouble and negatively affect his relationship with someone?



- How would you feel if someone published similar material featuring you?
- Is the situation or event you are photographing or recording not of a commercial nature - is it promoting the services or pro- ducts of some company or person?
 - Do you talk to children about safety in your establishment on the internet, privacy, trust?
- Are the children in your establishment in a difficult life situation? Do you publish photos or videos of them on your profiles, do you not stigmatise them, do you not label them as children from a difficult background that they will have to go through life with?
- If you are an orphanage, day-care centre or work with children with disabilities, is there any unpleasant consequences if you publish a photo of your children? in terms of their future and security?

It is worth ensuring that institutions working with children and young people approach the issue of image dissemination with great care and that decisions in this area are analysed - taking into account not only the legal side of the issue, but also the ethical and human













How else to approach the publication of photos and videos involving children?

There are many ways to show young people, emotions or precious moments from the activities of an establishment without making the visuals of the children identifiable.

The golden mean for sharing precious moments can be:

- publishing emotive photos or videos that do not show physical characteristics of the child that allow for its identification;
- publication of content showing the effects of children's activities, traces of their presence or activity (e.g. drawings);
- covering the children's faces in the photo by means of graphic elements, so-called stickers, or blurring the image, such changes being best
 The image should be entered in a graphics processing program, even a simple one, rather than using the tools available on social networking sites.
 In this way, the photo is uploaded to the site's server in a form that makes it impossible to identify the person depicted;
- if the photos are used to show parents the activities and activities at your centre, consider posting them **on a closed** parents' **group**;
- AI-generated images offer a certain alternative, but it is worth bearing
 in mind that this solution, too, is subject to the risks that arise from the
 from the fact that artificial intelligence may be based on data and
 material already published on the web, and the final result of its work
 may confusingly resemble a real person;
- space for your ideas



most valuable, however, will be to talk to children about their right to decide on their own image and to respect the rights of others in this area.

Examples of images:







ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

- → *Orange Foundation Child Protection Policy*, Orange Foundation.
- → *Standards for the Protection of Minors*, Give Children Strength Foundation.
- → Sharenting and the child's online image. A guide for parents, A. Borkowska, M. Witkowska, NASK, Warsaw 2020.
- → Empathic institutions. Children's rights as human rights in organisational practice, K. Ciesiolkiewicz (ed.).
- Teenagers 3.0. Report from a nationwide survey of students and parents, R. Lange (ed.), NASK, Warsaw 2023.
- Troll parenting, or parents making fun of their own children online, K. Majak.
- Kidfluencers and kidfluencers. How instarodzice turn childhood into a commodity, M. Szymaniak.
- → Dangerous parental behaviour online sharenting, oversharenting and troll parenting, A. Zychma.



ENDNOTES

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