BASIC PROTECTIONS

Combatting sexual exploitation on pornography websites through the Crime and Policing Act 2026



UKFEMINISTA

Acknowledgements

We pay tribute to the immense courage of survivors who have spoken out about violence and abuse they experienced through the pornography trade. Their voices have been crucial to changing the law in the UK and securing greater protections for all women and girls.

UK Feminista is proud to campaign alongside a broad and brave movement of survivors, organisations and cross-party parliamentarians standing up against industrial-scale sexual exploitation and demanding justice. We are grateful to the charitable trusts and supporters who make our work possible.

Basic Protections: Combatting sexual exploitation on pornography websites through the Crime and Policing Act 2026

UK Feminista, 2026

UK Feminista's work depends on donations from supporters and charitable trusts. Please help us drive change at ukfeminista.org.uk

Contents

Foreword	4
Executive summary	5
Introduction	6
Why protections are needed	10
What protections are needed	13
The Principles	14
Interview with Alia Azariah, Survivor Leader	17
Counter-arguments	21
References	23

Foreword



For too long, pornography websites have enjoyed almost total impunity to publish and profit from videos featuring sexual violence, exploitation and abuse.

Pornography websites accessed from the UK are not required to take even basic steps to protect against some of the most egregious abuses imaginable. They do not, for instance, have to check that everyone featured in videos on their platform is an adult – or knows the video exists.

The consequences have been horribly predictable: child sexual abuse, rape and trafficking have repeatedly been found on mainstream pornography websites.

While anyone can be affected, these harms are shaped by intersecting forms of inequality and discrimination, disproportionately impacting on women and girls and often compounded by factors such as poverty, age and immigration status.

The Government has the power to combat this. As a result of a multi-year campaign by survivors, organisations and parliamentarians, the **Government now has the power to require pornography websites accessed from the UK: verify that everyone featured on their site is an adult, gave permission for the content to be published, and has the ability to withdraw their consent to its continued publication at any time.**

Let us be clear: these are rock-bottom protections – not a panacea against the sexual abuse rampant in the pornography trade. Taking steps to verify that everyone is an adult and gave their permission for the videos to be published – and enabling them to withdraw their consent - is the absolute least that pornography websites should have to do.

Yet the Government is not yet enforcing these basic protections. First, it is conducting a 12-month review.

That is why UK Feminista has created the '**Principles for age and consent safeguards on pornography websites**', supported by survivors, organisations and parliamentarians cross-party. These set out key requirements that the Government must place on pornography websites, using powers in the Crime and Policing Act 2026.

Survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse have led the way in demanding change. It is time to honour their bravery.

Nina Humphries
Director | UK Feminista

Executive summary

Currently, pornography websites do not take even the most basic steps to prevent sexual violence and exploitation being published on their platform. As a result, sex trafficking and sexual violence are rampant in the online pornography trade.

The Crime and Policing Act 2026 gives the UK Government the power to force pornography websites accessed from the UK to take basic action to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse. However, these powers are not yet being used. The Government is first conducting a 12 month review.

Survivors, organisations and parliamentarians have come together to support the 'Principles for age and ongoing consent protections on pornography websites'. The Principles highlight key obligations that the Government should place on pornography websites, using powers granted by the Crime and Policing Act 2026. This includes requiring pornography websites to:

- Verify that every individual featured in pornographic content on their platform is an **adult** before the content is published.
- Verify that every individual featured in pornographic content on their platform has given their **permission** for the content to be published.
- Enable every person featured in pornographic content on their platform to **withdraw their consent** to its continued publication at any time, for any reason.

If the operators of an online platform hosting pornography refuse to take basic steps to check they are not distributing videos of child sexual abuse, sexual violence or pornography of a person against their will – they should not be allowed to operate in the UK.

The Government must act now to adopt and enforce these basic protections against sexual exploitation and abuse.

Introduction

About UK Feminista

UK Feminista is a charitable organisation working for a society free from sexism and violence against women and girls.

Combatting commercial sexual exploitation is central to UK Feminista's mission. Commercial sexual exploitation is the provision of money, accommodation, employment, goods or services in return for sex acts. It is a form of violence against women. Commercial sexual exploitation is predominantly perpetrated against some of the most vulnerable and marginalised women in society, who face multiple and overlapping forms of disadvantage and discrimination. It includes exploitation through prostitution, sex trafficking, pornography, stripping and 'webcamming'.

In partnership with survivors and frontline services, UK Feminista conducts pioneering research, develops public policy solutions and leads national advocacy for the most effective approaches to preventing commercial sexual exploitation. As part of our work, UK Feminista provides the Secretariat for the UK Parliament's **All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Commercial Sexual Exploitation**.

Tackling sexual harassment and sexism in schools and colleges

Alongside our work to combat sexual exploitation, UK Feminista supports schools and colleges to prevent sexism and sexual harassment - experienced by over a third of girls in UK schools.

We conduct research and provide evidence-based training and resources on the most effective strategies for making education settings safe and equal. We celebrate best practice through our annual Action Award scheme.



The Crime and Policing Act 2026

On 29 April 2026, the Crime and Policing Act 2026 was adopted by the UK Parliament. The Act gives the Government the power to mandate that all pornography websites accessed from the UK:[1]

- Verify that everyone featured in pornographic content on their platform is an **adult**.
- Verify that every individual featured in pornographic content on their platform has given **permission** for it to be published.
- Enable everyone who features in pornographic content on their platform to **withdraw consent** to its continued publication at any time.

However, the Crime and Policing Act 2026 also mandates the UK Government to conduct a review of the role of providers of internet services in undertaking these activities. A report of that review must be published by 29 April 2027.[2]

The inclusion of amendments relating to the age and ongoing consent of individuals who appear on pornography websites in the Crime and Policing Act was the result of a multi-year campaign to secure basic protections against sexual exploitation and abuse in the pornography trade. It involved survivors, parliamentarians and non-governmental organisations.

Highlights from the campaign so far

July 2022 Parliament debates amendments tabled by **Dame Diana Johnson MP** to the Online Safety Bill, supported by **UK Feminista**, to require pornography websites to verify the age and permission of everyone on their site - and enable withdrawal of consent at any time.[3]

February 2023 The **APPG on Commercial Sexual Exploitation** and Secretariat, **UK Feminista**, recommend pornography websites be required to verify the age and permission of everyone on their platform and enable withdrawal of consent at any time.[4]

February 2025 The **Independent Pornography Review**, conducted by **Baroness Bertin**, recommends pornography websites be required to verify the age and permission of everyone on their platform - and enable withdrawal of consent at any time.[5]

March 2025 Amendments to the Crime and Policing Bill requiring age and ongoing consent verification on pornography websites are tabled in the **Commons** by **Jess Asato MP** - and co-signed by **over 50 MPs** cross-party.[6]

October 2025 Amendments to the Crime and Policing Bill requiring age and ongoing consent verification on pornography websites are tabled in the **Lords** by **Baroness Bertin**.[7]

November 2025 Survivor Leader **Alia Azariah** speaks to the APPG on Commercial Sexual Exploitation about why she backs the amendments.[8]

March 2026 The House of Lords **votes in favour** of Baroness Bertin's amendments to the Crime and Policing Bill.[9]

March 2026 **UK Feminista** convenes campaigners and parliamentarians at Parliament to urge Government to keep Baroness Bertin's amendments in the Crime and Policing Bill.[10]

April 2026 The Government tables amendments on age and consent protections, which become law on **29 April**.[11]

What the Crime and Policing Act 2026 says about age and ongoing consent protections on pornography websites[12]

Part 5, Chapter 4, Section 108

Online pornography (age and consent verification): duty to review and report

(1)The Secretary of State must conduct a review of the role of providers of internet services in—
(a)verifying the age of individuals appearing in pornographic content published or displayed on their services;
(b)verifying whether individuals appearing in pornographic content published or displayed on their services consent to the content being published or displayed.
(2)The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament, and publish, a report of the review.
(3)The Secretary of State must comply with subsections (1) and (2) before the end of the 12 month period beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.
(4)In this section the following terms have the same meaning as in the Online Safety Act 2023 —
"internet service" (see section 228 of that Act);
"pornographic content" (see section 236 of that Act);
"provider", in relation to an internet service of any kind (see section 226 of that Act).

Part 5, Chapter 4, 109

Online pornography (age and consent verification): power to amend Online Safety Act 2023

(1)The Online Safety Act 2023 is amended as follows.
(2)After section 217 insert—
"Power to amend Act: pornographic content
217APower to impose duties about pornographic content
(1)The Secretary of State may by regulations amend this Act for or in connection with the imposition, on providers of regulated services or regulated services of a particular kind, of duties relating to—
(a)verifying the age of individuals appearing in pornographic content published or displayed on those regulated services ("age verification duties");
(b)verifying whether individuals appearing in pornographic content published or displayed on those regulated services consent to the content being published or displayed ("consent verification duties").
(2)Age verification duties and consent verification duties may include duties relating to the systems and processes used to operate regulated services, or regulated services of a particular kind.
(3)Consent verification duties may include duties relating to cases where consent previously given is withdrawn.
(4)Regulations under this section may make provision requiring OFCOM to issue guidance to providers of regulated services, or regulated services of a particular kind, to assist them to comply with age verification duties and consent verification duties.
(5)The provisions of this Act that may be amended by the regulations in connection with the imposition of age verification duties and consent verification duties include, but are not limited to, section 131(2)."
(3)In section 225(1) (regulations subject to affirmative procedure) after paragraph (g) insert—
"(ga)regulations under section 217A,".

Part 5, Chapter 4, 110

Online pornography (age and consent verification): power to make regulations

(1)The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision for or in connection with the imposition on providers of specified internet services of duties relating to—
(a)verifying the age of individuals appearing in pornographic content published or displayed on those internet services ("age verification duties");
(b)verifying whether individuals appearing in pornographic content published or displayed on those internet services consent to the content being published or displayed ("consent verification duties").
(2)Age verification duties and consent verification duties may include duties relating to the systems and processes used to operate specified internet services.
(3)Consent verification duties may include duties relating to cases where consent previously given is withdrawn.
(4)The regulations may confer functions on—
(a)a body established by the regulations, or
(b)another body specified in the regulations, ("the regulator").
(5)The regulations may make provision—
(a)establishing or modifying the constitutional arrangements of the regulator;
(b)establishing or modifying the funding arrangements of the regulator.
(6)The functions which may be conferred on the regulator include—
(a)powers to, by notice, require providers of specified internet services to provide information to the regulator;
(b)powers, in relation to requirements imposed by or under the regulations, corresponding or similar to those conferred on OFCOM by or under Chapter 6 of Part 7 of the Online Safety Act 2023 in relation to enforceable requirements, including provisions conferring power to impose monetary penalties.
(7)The provision which may be made under subsection (6)(a) includes provision corresponding or similar to that made in relation to requirements to provide information to OFCOM by—
(a)section 109 of the Online Safety Act 2023 (offences in connection with information notices), and
(b)section 113 of that Act so far as relating to section 109 (penalties for information offences).
(8)If the regulations make provision under subsection (6)(b) corresponding or similar to provision in relation to which an appeal lies under section 168 of the Online Safety Act 2023, they must make corresponding or similar provision for an appeal.
(9)The regulations may make provision for appeals against other decisions of the regulator.
(10)The regulations may make provision requiring providers of specified internet services to pay fees to the regulator.
(11)The provision which may be made under subsection (10) includes provision corresponding or similar to that made in relation to the payment of fees to OFCOM by or under Part 6 of the Online Safety Act 2023.
(12)The regulations may make provision requiring the regulator to issue guidance to providers of specified internet services to assist them to comply with age verification duties and consent verification duties.
(13)References in this section to an internet service include an internet service provided from outside the United Kingdom—
(a)which has a significant number of United Kingdom users, or
(b)one of the target markets of which (or the only target market of which) is United Kingdom users.
(14)In this section the following terms have the same meaning as in the Online Safety Act 2023—
"internet service" (see section 228 of that Act);
"pornographic content" (see section 236 of that Act);
"provider", in relation to an internet service of any kind (see section 226 of that Act);
"United Kingdom user" (see section 227 of that Act).
(15)In this section "specified" means specified, or of a description specified, in the regulations.

Why protections are needed

Pornography websites are not currently required to verify that each person featured in pornographic content on their platform is an adult and gave their permission for it to be published there.

As a result, **mainstream pornography websites have repeatedly been found hosting and profiting from content that features child abuse, sexual violence and sex trafficking.**[13]

People harmed in the making and dissemination of pornography currently have no right to withdraw their consent to its continued publication. Consequently, **pornography websites freely publish and profit from pornography of individuals against their will.**

Yet exploitation and abuse have been shown to be rampant in the pornography trade.[14] Regardless of the conditions under which the content was filmed, no one should have pornography of them published against their will. The harms can be immense and affect every aspect of a person's life - emotional, social and financial.

"my abuse, my pornography is still available for consumption [...] The fear that I have that someone recognises me, or not only just that they recognise me, but to know that it's very likely that they've seen me at some of my most broken, and that there's likely some one sitting at their computer right now watching me be assaulted. That's a pretty heavy burden that I carry."[15]



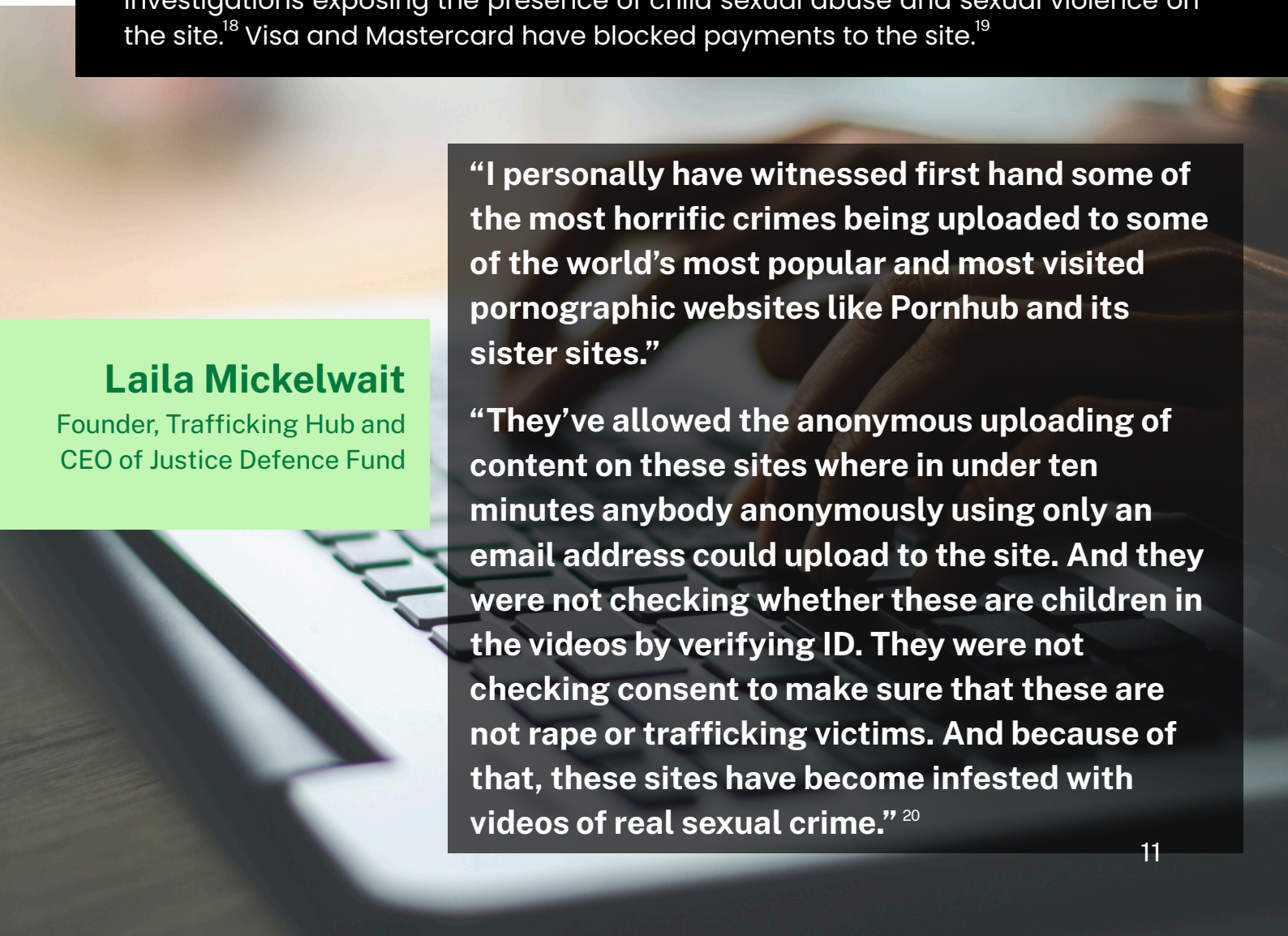
Alia Azariah
Survivor Leader

An inquiry into the pornography trade by the UK Parliament's APPG on Commercial Sexual Exploitation found that sexual coercion and abuse were endemic in the production of pornography - and illegal content is freely accessible on mainstream pornography websites. The reason, the APPG concluded, is: "leading pornography websites allow members of the public to upload pornographic videos to these sites without verifying that every individual in the video is an adult, or that everyone in the video gave their permission for it to be uploaded to the pornography website – or, indeed, that they even know the video exists." [16]

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) similarly report that pornography websites "routinely feature sexual violence, exploitation and abuse, and trafficking victims. Repeatedly these sites have chosen profits over reasonable prevention and protection measures." [17]

Pornhub

Pornhub - the most popular pornography website in the UK - deleted 80% of the videos on its platform in 2020, following international protests and media investigations exposing the presence of child sexual abuse and sexual violence on the site.[18] Visa and Mastercard have blocked payments to the site.[19]



Laila Mickelwait
Founder, Trafficking Hub and CEO of Justice Defence Fund

"I personally have witnessed first hand some of the most horrific crimes being uploaded to some of the world's most popular and most visited pornographic websites like Pornhub and its sister sites."

"They've allowed the anonymous uploading of content on these sites where in under ten minutes anybody anonymously using only an email address could upload to the site. And they were not checking whether these are children in the videos by verifying ID. They were not checking consent to make sure that these are not rape or trafficking victims. And because of that, these sites have become infested with videos of real sexual crime." [20]

‘GirlsDoPorn’

GirlsDoPorn was a sex trafficking operation in the US led by Michael Pratt - who, in 2025, was sentenced to 27 years in prison.[21]

Hundreds of young women were abused and exploited by the GirlsDoPorn perpetrators - who filmed the abuse and posted it online. The traffickers generated millions of dollors from people who paid to watch the footage.

> **“Victims were coerced into finishing shoots under threats of lawsuits, cancelled flights, and exposure. Some were effectively trapped in hotel rooms by camera equipment blocking the exits.”**
>
> U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of California[22]

GirlsDoPorn had a formal partnership with Pornhub - where footage filmed by the traffickers was posted. In 2021, Pornhub’s parent company settled a lawsuit brought by 50 survivors of GirlsDoPorn - who alleged that Pornhub continued its partnership with GirlsDoPorn despite knowing of the allegations against it.[23]



Mariah Rief

Survivor Advocate

“The GirlsDoPorn case was a criminal enterprise that created fictitious modelling ads that promised real modelling opportunity, that were fully clothed opportunities. The majority of women that they targeted were financially vulnerable and out of state.”

“I was nineteen at the time [...] I respond to every modelling ad because none of them said nudity. [...] I didn't know anything other than it was a beachfront photo shoot. It could have been for self-tanner, it could have been for sunglasses. I didn't know. I just was like, I can do that.”

“I remember so clearly that like stepping through that door meant that they were going to get whatever they wanted from me, whether I said yes or no, whether I consented, whatever they said that I was going to do, I had to do.”

“It was so dissociating that I looked out the window and internally I'm just begging myself, just go numb. Just go numb. Just go numb. Just go numb. Just go numb. Just go numb.”

Mariah read an impact statement in court during the sentencing of GirlsDoPorn perpetrator Andre Garcia:

“he dropped his head [...] and I grabbed onto the podium and I said, I said, ‘Look at me when I'm speaking to you.’”[24]

What protections are needed

The Crime and Policing Act 2026 gives the Government the power to mandate all pornography websites accessed from the UK to verify that everyone who features in pornography on their platform is an adult, gave their permission for the content to be published and can withdraw their consent to its continued publication at any time. These powers must be introduced and enforced without delay.

Age and ongoing consent protections are rock-bottom safeguards against sexual exploitation and abuse - not luxury extras. It is a scandal that pornography websites remain able to operate in the UK without them.

An alliance of survivors, organisations and parliamentarians are now calling on the UK Government to urgently adopt:

Principles for age and ongoing consent protections on pornography websites

These principles highlight key requirements that the UK Government should place on pornography websites, using powers granted by the Crime and Policing Act 2026. The Principles are set out on the following pages.

Online platforms must not be allowed to publish and profit from pornography of a person against their will - without exception.

Pornography websites must be required to verify that every person appearing in content on their platform is an adult and gave permission for it to be published - *and* has the ability to withdraw their consent at any time, for any reason.

The Principles

for age and ongoing consent protections on pornography websites

1 Internet services must verify that every individual featured in pornographic content on their platform is 18 years old or above before the content is published.

a) The verification mechanism must meet the standard required by Ofcom for age verification for pornography website users.

b) Verification must establish that the individual was 18 years old or above at the time the content was recorded.

c) Auditable records demonstrating compliance with the age verification duty must be maintained by the service and presented to the regulator as required.

d) The privacy of individuals completing age verification must be prioritised and protected.

2 Internet services must verify that every individual featured in pornographic content on their platform has given their permission for the content to be published there.

a) The permission verification process must be completed by the individual featured in the video, not a third party, and the verification mechanism must meet the standards required by the regulator.

b) If the person uploading the content to the internet service does not appear in the pornography, that individual must also provide identity verification to the service.

c) Auditable records demonstrating compliance with the permission verification duty must be maintained by the service and presented to the regulator as required.

d) The privacy of individuals completing permission verification must be prioritised and protected.

3

Where a person reports that they withdraw consent to pornography in which they appear being published on the internet service, that service must remove any material featuring the person within 48 hours of it being reported, consistent with existing platform requirements relating to non-consensual intimate image abuse.

a) Individuals can withdraw their consent to publication for any reason at any time, and they must not be required to provide a reason for their withdrawal of consent.

b) Individuals can report their withdrawal of consent via existing mechanisms for non-consensual intimate image abuse. This means individuals can contact the platform hosting pornography directly or a third party can notify the website on their behalf. Individuals should also be able to report their withdrawal of consent to the regulator.

c) The regulator must assess compliance with take-down requests where consent to publication has been withdrawn.

d) The platform hosting pornography must remove all content in which the individual who has withdrawn consent appears. It is not sufficient to attempt to disguise the person. If the person remains wholly or partly visible in the pornography, this constitutes non-compliance.

Supported by

- UK Feminista
- Barnardo's
- CEASE
- Rape Crisis England and Wales
- Rape Crisis Scotland
- Equality Now
- Streetlight UK
- Scottish Women's Convention
- YES Matters
- You My Sister
- Not Buying It
- Women@theWell
- Eleanor Lyons, Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner
- National Education Union
- Kairos WWT
- Women's Resource Centre
- Lanarkshire Rape Crisis Centre
- Engendering Change
- FORWARDUK
- Dignify (One YMCA)
- Justice Defence Fund
- Laila Mickelwait
- Alia Azariah, Survivor Leader
- Mariah Rief, Survivor Advocate
- Uldouz Wallace, Founder of Foundation RA & PROTECT Act
- Baroness Bertin
- Baroness Jenkin
- Baroness Davies
- Baroness Hazarika
- Tracy Gilbert MP
- Jess Asato MP
- Tonia Antoniazzi MP
- Kirsteen Sullivan MP
- Antonia Bance MP
- Susanna Rustin, journalist

I was one of the victims of the 2014 iCloud hack leak and I have personally experienced the long-term damage that non-consensual content causes."

"I spent years chasing takedowns with no real result. And what I realised is that it doesn't matter how many takedowns I do, it becomes a bottomless pit. As soon as something is removed, it is reuploaded again and again, and victims are trapped in a system where they are forced to relive their trauma over and over."

"It reflects the same preventative approach I have been advancing for years through the PROTECT Act [...] this is exactly what is needed: protection before harm occurs, not after." [25]



Uldouz Wallace

Founder of Foundation RA and creator of the PROTECT Act

Interview with Alia Azariah, Survivor Leader

You successfully campaigned for the UK Government to have powers to force pornography websites to verify the age and permission of everyone featured in content on their platforms, and allow people to withdraw their consent to its continued publication. What motivated you to campaign for these protections?

Alia Azariah is Director of Collective Impact at Safe House Project and a 2025-26 Obama USA Leader



When I was twenty years old, I sat at my manager's kitchen table and signed my first contract. I had never signed a legal document before. I was young, I was a single mother, and I was living in poverty. I was told that I had choices. That if I ever felt uncomfortable or unsafe, I could leave. At my very first shoot, I tried to do exactly that. And I learned very quickly that those choices weren't really mine to make. **The contract I had signed was used against me. What I had understood to be permission was treated as an obligation, and my ability to say no had effectively been taken away.** That experience has stayed with me for a very long time.

Today, I have the privilege of working nationally and internationally to combat human trafficking. I spend most of my time advocating for better systems, stronger protections, and meaningful accountability. But I rarely speak publicly about this particular part of my life. Partly because it is deeply personal. But also because, unlike so many other things I have survived, this is something that doesn't feel entirely in the past. As long as those recordings exist and can continue to be distributed, there is a part of that exploitation that continues without my permission.

I got involved in this campaign because I know what it means to have your choices taken away. And **I know how profoundly it matters to have someone finally recognize that your voice, your body, and your consent still belong to you.**

I've spent much of my adult life fighting for protections that I never had. This was one of the rare opportunities where the protections we were fighting for might actually reach people like me, too.

Why do you support the 'Principles for age and ongoing consent' safeguards?

Because they address some of the most fundamental failures that allowed what happened to me, and to so many others, to happen in the first place. We should not have to debate whether someone was old enough to appear in pornography. We should not have to wonder whether they actually agreed to participate, or whether that agreement was informed, freely given, and made without coercion. And we certainly should not be telling people that because they consented to something once, they have surrendered the right to make decisions about their own bodies and images for the rest of their lives.

What matters to me about these Principles is that they place responsibility where it belongs: on the platforms that publish, distribute, and profit from this material. For far too long, the burden has fallen on the people who were harmed to prove that they deserve protection. These Principles offer an opportunity to change that. The legislation gives the Government the authority to act. These Principles are about making sure that authority results in something meaningful for the people whose lives are affected.

Why do you believe people should be able to withdraw their consent to the continued publication of pornography they appear in, at any time, for any reason?

Because consent should never be something you lose the right to reconsider. **When I was twenty, I made decisions through the lens of everything I had already survived. I was a single mother living in poverty, and I believed people who promised me an opportunity for a better life. It took years for me to fully understand how much trauma, exploitation, and desperation had shaped what I believed were my choices.**

I'm thirty-five now. I've built a life and a career dedicated to helping others. I have grown, healed, and become someone that the twenty-year-old sitting at that kitchen table could never have imagined. But recordings made during one of the most vulnerable periods of my life can still exist in the world, regardless of how I feel about them today.

I think about how extraordinary it is that we can recognise someone's right to leave a relationship, a workplace, or an unsafe situation, but somehow believe that a decision to appear in pornography should be permanent and irrevocable. People should be allowed to grow. They should be allowed to change their minds. And they should be allowed to decide that something they once agreed to, or felt they had no choice but to agree to, is no longer something they want shared with the world. I shouldn't have to spend the rest of my life living with a decision I made at twenty simply because someone else continues to profit from it. And nobody should have to prove that their reasons for wanting it removed are good enough.

What does your work today involve?

I'm the Director of Collective Impact at Safe House Project, a national organisation working to combat human trafficking in the United States. My work focuses on building the systems that allow us to identify trafficking earlier, respond more effectively, and make sure survivors have access to the support they deserve. I oversee national training initiatives, partnerships, and collaborative efforts across communities and organisations.

Throughout my career, I've trained more than 250,000 professionals, working to equip the people who are most likely to encounter trafficking with the knowledge and tools to recognise it and respond. A significant part of my work is bringing together people and institutions that have historically worked in isolation, because **I believe meaningful change comes when we stop relying on individual acts of heroism and start building systems that consistently protect people.**

Most of my professional work isn't focused on pornography. And that's intentional. I never wanted my life or my work to be defined entirely by what happened to me. But I also recognize that my experiences give me a perspective that can be valuable in conversations like this one.

If sharing something deeply personal can help prevent someone else from experiencing the same harm, or help restore some measure of dignity and choice to people who have already experienced it, then I believe it's worth doing.

What is your message to Ministers?

You have an opportunity to give people something that many of us were never afforded: the right to have our no respected, even after we once said yes.

I know what it feels like to be told that a signature matters more than your safety. I know what it means to have other people make money from something that caused you harm, and to feel as though you have no power to stop it. And I know that there are people living with that reality right now.

This legislation creates an opportunity to change that. But the protections have to be real. Age verification has to mean something. Consent has to be informed and freely given. And the ability to withdraw consent cannot exist only on paper. It has to result in content actually being removed.

You have the power to ensure that someone's past does not permanently strip them of their right to make decisions about their future.

For people who have spent years feeling powerless over how their own bodies and images are used, that would mean more than I can adequately put into words.

I'm asking you to use that power.

“Diverse feminist scholars and legal systems around the world are increasingly recognising the harm to individuals that can be caused by unwanted dissemination of sexual images [...] This amendment [age and ongoing consent verification] thus recognizes the important interest that individuals have in controlling the circumstances in which they engage in, and are seen to be engaging in, sexual activity.

As the philosopher Thomas Nagel has written, "The boundary between what we reveal and what we do not, and some control over that boundary, is among the most important attributes of our humanity."

I hope that this amendment sets the model which eventually every country will follow.”

Dr Joan O’Brian, Harvard University

Counter-arguments

'It is not possible for pornography sites to adopt these measures - so they shouldn't be mandatory'

If a pornography website cannot verify that the individuals featured on their platform are adults and gave their permission for the content to be published, then it should not be operating.

Preventing the distribution of child abuse, violence against women and pornography against a person's will is not an optional extra. As it happens, technology and initiatives do exist enabling digital platforms to verify the age and permission of individuals featured in their content and enable withdrawal of consent to publication.

'Trafficking and child abuse are already illegal'

These measures are preventative safeguards. Arguing that further laws are not needed to stop trafficking and child abuse on websites because the acts themselves are crimes is an argument against the need for the Online Safety Act – the UK's flagship online safety legislation. The Online Safety Act was not introduced to create new offences, but to force platforms to adopt systems and processes that prevent illegal content being hosted, and hold them accountable for doing so. Requiring pornography companies to verify the age and ongoing consent of people on their platform is a system to prevent these platforms hosting content that involves sexual violence and child sexual exploitation. They are preventative measures entirely consistent with the Online Safety Act.

'The Online Safety Act solves the problem'

It doesn't. **There is no express requirement in the Online Safety Act** for pornography websites to verify, prior to publication, that everyone featured in pornography on their platform is an adult and gave permission for the content to be published on that platform. Nor does it contain any right or mechanism for individuals featured in content on pornography websites to withdraw their consent and have the content removed – enabling websites to continue publishing pornography of people against their will.

'What pornography sites choose to publish is a commercial matter – Government has no role'

Distributing pornography of a person against their will can cause enormous psychological and social harms to them. **Publishing and profiting from pornography of a person against their will is sexual exploitation and abuse – and it is the responsibility of Government to protect people against this.** It is also entirely within their power to do this.

Survivors have bravely spoken out about exploitation and violence in the pornography industry, with investigations by the Independent Pornography Review and the APPG on Commercial Sexual Exploitation highlighting the multiple serious harms experienced by women before, during and after their involvement in the pornography trade. The fact that at one point in time a woman signed a contract with a pornographer does not lessen any of those harms; in fact, it can compound them.

As Survivor Leader Alia Azariah has shared: "I had never signed a legal document before. I did not understand the language. And I did not understand that a signature could be used to override my safety. I trusted the people in front of me because they were promising safety, and I had no other source of it. The reality of what I had signed became clear very quickly. At my first shoot, I knew I was unsafe and tried to leave. I had been told that was possible, that it was even encouraged, but what I was met with was the contract, not concern. Not care. It was the contract that was used to keep me there." [26]

Governments have a simple choice: prioritise the rights of pornography websites to make money – or the right of every person not to have pornography of them published against their will.

'Appearing in a pornography video is equivalent to acting in a mainstream entertainment film – same rules should apply'

Appearing in a video on a pornography website performing sex acts is fundamentally different to acting in a mainstream entertainment film – in practically every possible way: physically, psychologically and socially.

Consequently, industries dedicated to creating and profiting from these fundamentally different types of activity should not be regulated in the same way.

Survivors have repeatedly spoken out about the endemic sexual violence and abuse in the pornography trade, with the APPG on Commercial Sexual Exploitation concluding that "sexual coercion is inherent to the commercial production of pornography".[27]

Regardless of the conditions or context in which it was produced, the presence of a recording of a person performing sex acts on a pornography website can have profound, wide-ranging and ongoing implications for that person. To help prevent serious harms, they must have the right to withdraw their consent to the recording remaining on the pornography website – and have that right upheld.

"Age and consent verification must be conducted by independent third-party providers to avoid the demonstrated pitfalls of industry self-policing and ensure meaningful accountability. Crucially, these safeguards must also apply retrospectively: all previously uploaded content that has not been properly verified must be removed and only reinstated once the age and informed consent of every person depicted have been independently verified."

Laila Mickelwait
Founder, Trafficking Hub and CEO of Justice Defence Fund

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